FUTURE
RETRO GAMER
THE BOOK OF MARIO TENTH EDITION

THE BOOK OF MARIO

100% UNOFFICIAL!

From the makers of retro GAMER

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO GAMING'S MOST ICONIC CHARACTER

INTERVIEWS ★ EVERY CLASSIC MARIO GAME COVERED ★ IN-DEPTH FEATURES

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THE BOOK OF MARIO

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THE GREATEST SUPER MARIO MOMENTS

WELCOME TO

THE BOOK OF MARIO

When Shigeru Miyamoto created Jumpman for his new platform game, *Donkey Kong*, it's highly unlikely that he realised he was creating the most recognisable gaming character of all time. That's exactly what happened though, and after a quick name change to Mario as well as a change in job professions (he started off life as a carpenter) the mascot to end all mascots was born. Unlike his biggest competitor, Sonic, Mario has rarely starred in a duff platformer and while he's not immune to the odd turkey (*Mario Is Missing*, we're looking at you) his core platforming adventures have always been regarded as some of the best around.

Everyone remembers the first time they discovered the princess they were rescuing was in another castle, or their first encounter with Bowser. They remember the impact of witnessing a 3D Mario in *Super Mario 64* or the time they tore across Rainbow Road in *Super Mario Kart*. Even if you're not a big fan of Mario like us, there's no denying the incredible impact he's had on the games industry. To celebrate Nintendo's most prominent player, we've selected the best features from past issues of **Retro Gamer** and have also added plenty of new ones that cover every aspect of the popular character. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed making it. So in the words of the big man himself: here we go!

The Super Mario Bros series has been defining gaming since the Eighties. We've selected 30 of your favourite moments and asked developers to share their memories about the evergreen franchise

Mario is easily one of gaming's most iconic and recognisable figures. While he's been around since 1981 in the guise of Jumpman, it wasn't until he became super in 1985 that gamers really started to take notice of the mustachioed plumber.

When Shigeru Miyamoto created *Super Mario Bros* he also effectively recreated the platformer, creating a template that would not only shape the later *Mario* games for many years, but also platformers in general. Nintendo would again change the goalposts in 1996 with *Super Mario 64* and while other contenders have come close, no current developer is making 3D platformers that can compete with the likes of *Super Mario Galaxy* and *Super Mario 3D World,* in short Mario is the king at what he does and it's a fact that's unlikely to change any time soon.

But we've covered Mario's history in the past (in issue 82 no less) so for this new book we instead wanted to look at why the *Super Mario Bros* series is so popular with gamers. There's a reason why *Super Mario* games have sold nearly 300 million sales and it's because they're some of the most inventive and well-designed games of their genre. But don't just take our word for it, the following moments are some of your favourites and we've also persuaded a large number of classic developers to share their personal memories too. Here's to many more years of everyone's favourite plumber.

SUPER MARIO BROS TIMELINE

The games Nintendo considers to be part of the series

SUPER MARIO MAKER 2 2019
NINTENDO SWITCH

SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY 2017
NINTENDO SWITCH

SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY 2017
NINTENDO SWITCH

SUPER MARIO MAKER 2015
NINTENDO WII U

SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD 2013
NINTENDO WII U

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS U 2012
NINTENDO WII U

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS 2 2012
NINTENDO 3DS

SUPER MARIO 3D LAND 2011
NINTENDO 3DS

SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2 2010
NINTENDO WII

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS WII 2009
NINTENDO WII

SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2007
NINTENDO WII

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS 2006
NINTENDO DS

SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE 2002
GAMECUBE

SUPER MARIO 64 1996
NINTENDO 64

SUPER MARIO LAND 2: 6 GOLDEN COINS 1992
GAME BOY

SUPER MARIO WORLD 1990
SUPER NINTENDO

SUPER MARIO LAND 1989
GAME BOY

SUPER MARIO BROS 3 1988
NES

SUPER MARIO BROS 2 1988
NES

SUPER MARIO BROS: THE LOST LEVELS 1986
NES

SUPER MARIO BROS 1985
NES

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How a humble carpenter became one of gaming's most significant icons

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The best bits from the classy sequel

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Why Nintendo's Wii sequel is as good as everyone says

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Mario's only Wii U adventure is unmissable

Super Mario Odyssey

Everything you need to know about Mario's latest platformer, including the best enemies to possess and the coolest moons to find

The Mario Bros. movie

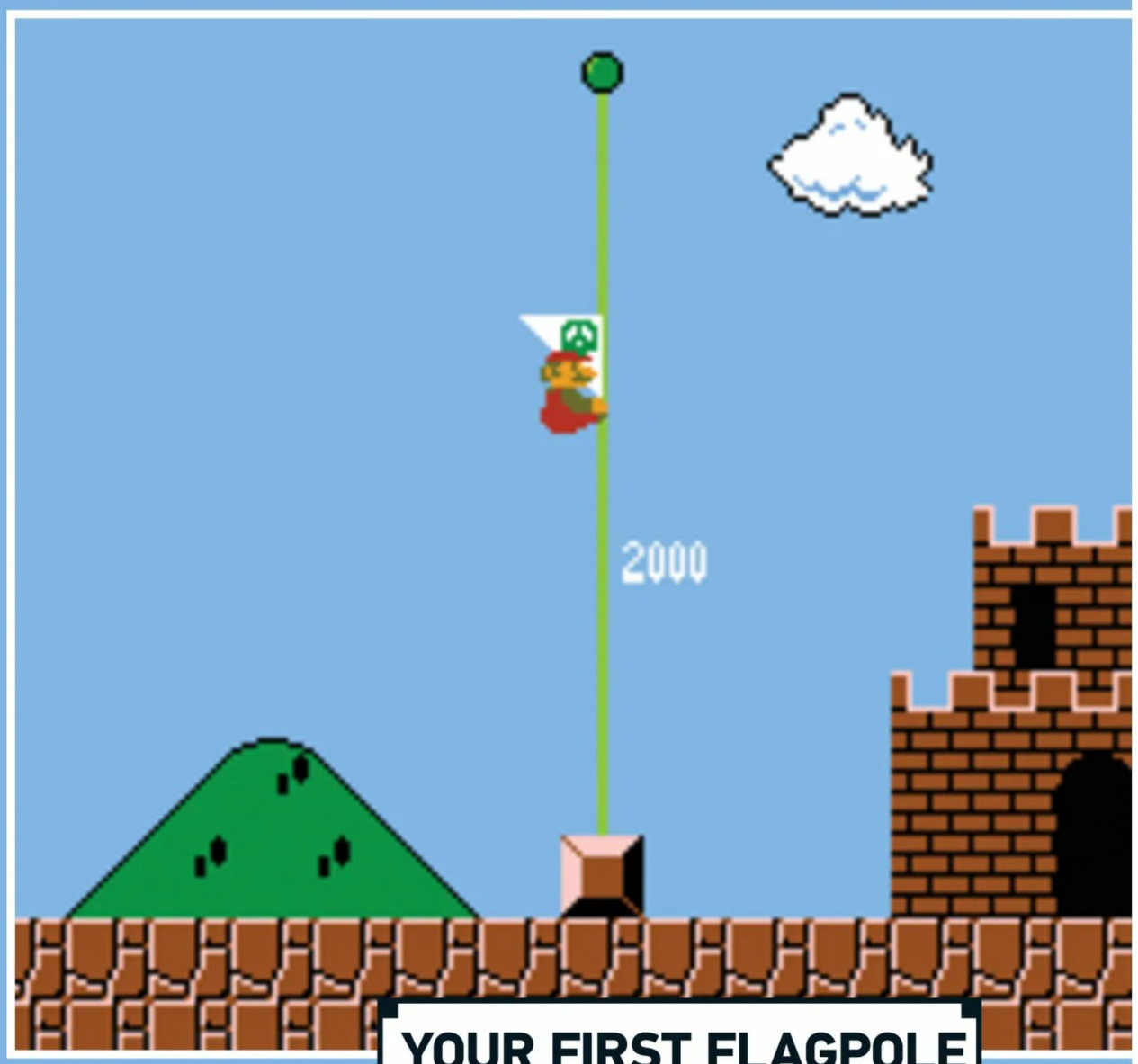
How the film came together and became a box-office hit

"It shouldn't come as any surprise that, as a game creator, my reaction to a game might be different from that of your average game player. The early *Mario* games on the NES bear this out.

My first reaction to *Mario* was surprise that the game so obviously used character-mapped background graphics. Shigeru Miyamoto made a conscious decision to build Mario's world out of blocks. In doing so, he allowed for a very large world due to memory efficiencies, but it represented a step backward in videogame imagery. He took a big risk. As *Super Mario Bros* was the flagship game franchise that everyone would associate with the NES system itself, the risk was that gamers would consider the NES to be inferior hardware to machines of the day providing much more realism.

As it played out, the game overcame the risks involved. Using character-mapping the world could be much larger and the gameplay experience more richly rewarding. Players thought of the colorful, blocky game backgrounds as more of a fantasy art-direction than a technical limitation, and the gameplay was the star anyway."

DAVID CRANE, ACTIVISION



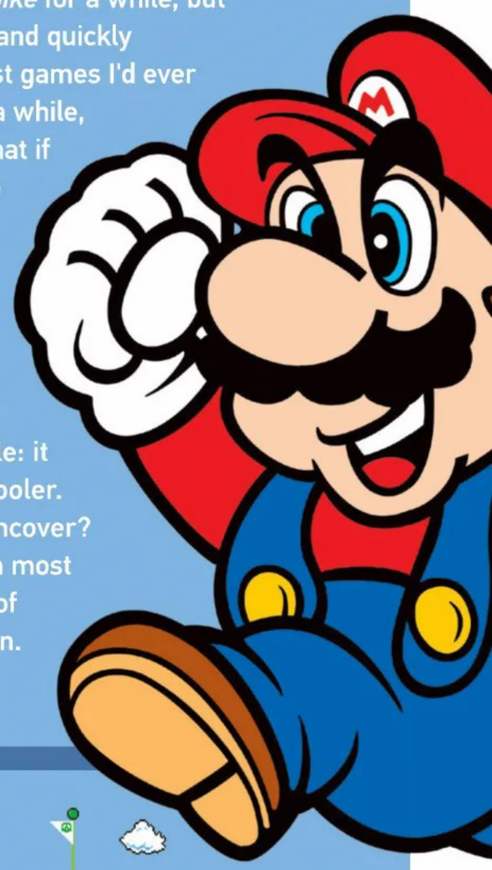
YOUR FIRST FLAGPOLE

Even when your first moment of victory is in sight, there's one last challenge as you try to jump to the top of the flagpole for more points. If you're lucky, you might even get some fireworks after lowering the flag! It's a smart and iconic bit of game design.

As a plumber, it makes sense for Mario to hang around pipes. It doesn't make quite as much sense for him to travel through them, but after the first time you travel down one and find a secret cache of coins, you'll always check them for hidden rooms.

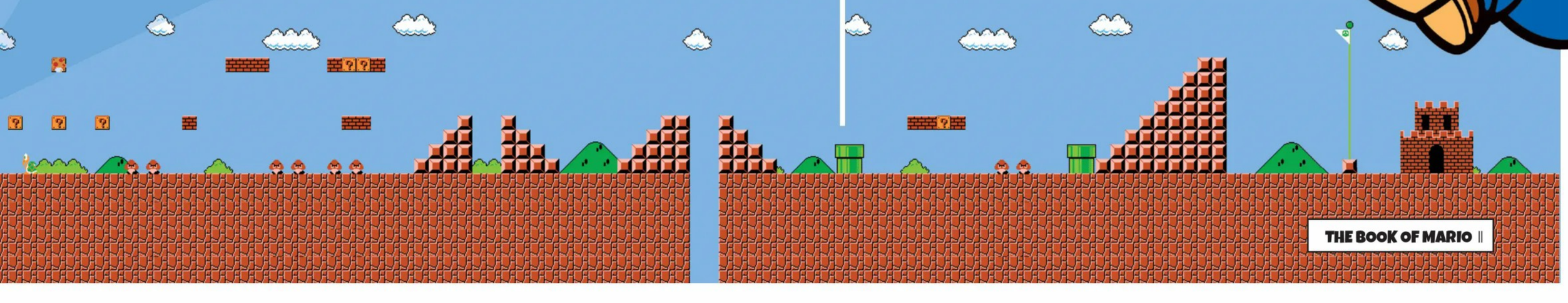
"My favourite *Mario* moment comes from what I believe was my first session playing the game while visiting Activision when I was working at *ZZAP!64* back in late-1985 or very early-1986. It had a new imported NES and an American TV to play it on. I'd been playing *Excitebike* for a while, but then switched to *Super Mario Bros*, and quickly realised that it was one of the coolest games I'd ever played. I'd been running around for a while, when, by sheer fluke, I discovered that if you pulled down on the joypad while standing on a certain pipe, Mario was transported to a different area. Sure, that's a standard thing these days, but back then, the feeling of discovery, and the realisation that there was another world under the one I was standing on was incredible: it made a seriously cool game even cooler. What more secrets were there to uncover? My mind was blown. At a time when most games didn't have much in the way of hidden stuff, it really was a revelation. What a game!"

JULIAN RIGNALL, JOURNALIST



YOUR FIRST STAR

When a flashing star is revealed for the first time you automatically imagine that it's something pretty special – and this one doesn't disappoint. Mario's temporary invincibility turns him into a wrecking machine, capable of running straight through his foes without fear. It's an amazing feeling of power.



WORLD 1-1 Super Mario Bros

There's nothing like your first time. As your finger jabs the rubbery start button of the controller, the screen goes dark and you're presented with a title card for World 1-1. You hear those first notes of the game's theme – a tune that will be etched upon your memory forever – and proceed into the first stage of *Super Mario Bros*.

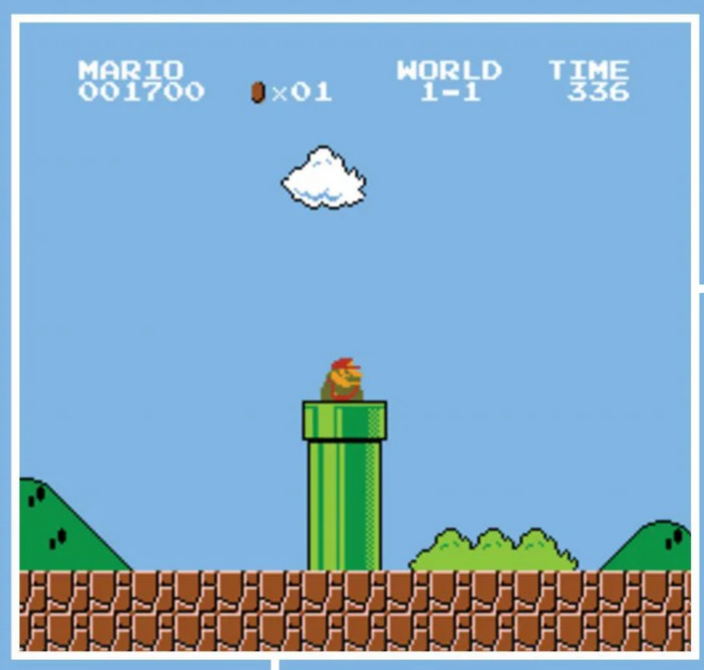
To this day, very few first stages do as good a job of equipping the player as that of *Super Mario Bros*. The game doesn't need a wordy tutorial, because the level design does a great job of naturally creating curiosity and teaching the player about various game elements. All objects are placed on the right of the starting screen, encouraging you to move forward. Blocks bearing question marks draw attention to themselves, inviting the player to interact. The Goomba looks mean and advances towards Mario, making a confrontation of some kind inevitable.

World 1-1 contains enough challenge to make a player feel accomplished in victory, but is gentle enough that even a small child can finish it with a little practice. You'll play through it enough times to remember it by heart and learn to finish it in under a minute, but it never gets old because this first level *is Super Mario Bros*.

"My favorite is the arcade version of [*Super*] *Mario Bros* that I first saw. This game had numerous jaw-dropping moments for me that nowadays we take for granted, like a smoothly scrolling landscape. But what really blew me away was the moment I discovered I could enter certain green pipes and discover new areas. This simple feature made the entire *Mario* world seem vastly bigger and more mysterious to me. As children we're always fascinated by discovering caves and exploring what's inside them, and Mario captured that magic with the green pipes, each of which represented the possibility of an entirely new area to discover and explore. After that, secret areas became the norm in games, and I know in the Apogee and 3D Realms games I was involved in, we always tried to include as many secret area as we could. All because of *Mario Bros*."
SCOTT MILLER, 3D REALMS

YOUR FIRST MUSHROOM

The enticing question mark block is just begging to be jumped at, and doing so reveals a mushroom – which then starts moving and, when collected, makes Mario grow into the more resilient Super Mario. It feels so routine now, but in 1985 it was quite a surreal sight.



YOUR FIRST PIPE JOURNEY

"Speeding through World 1-1 on *SMB* NES and getting that first running jump to get the full 1000 points on the flagpole, giving the feeling that you're off to a great start. Yeah right!" **SAMHAIN81**

"The best thing I've ever done is a *Mario* game has to be discovering the first Warp in *Super Mario Bros* on the NES. Discovering a secret vine, which then allowed me to climb outside of the top of the level and run across the top of it was staggering. There were five other people in the room and we were all gobsmacked to discover the Warp Pipes. Back then, cheats and secrets felt far more valuable than they do today." **ALEX WARD, CRITERION**

YOUR FIRST SECRET

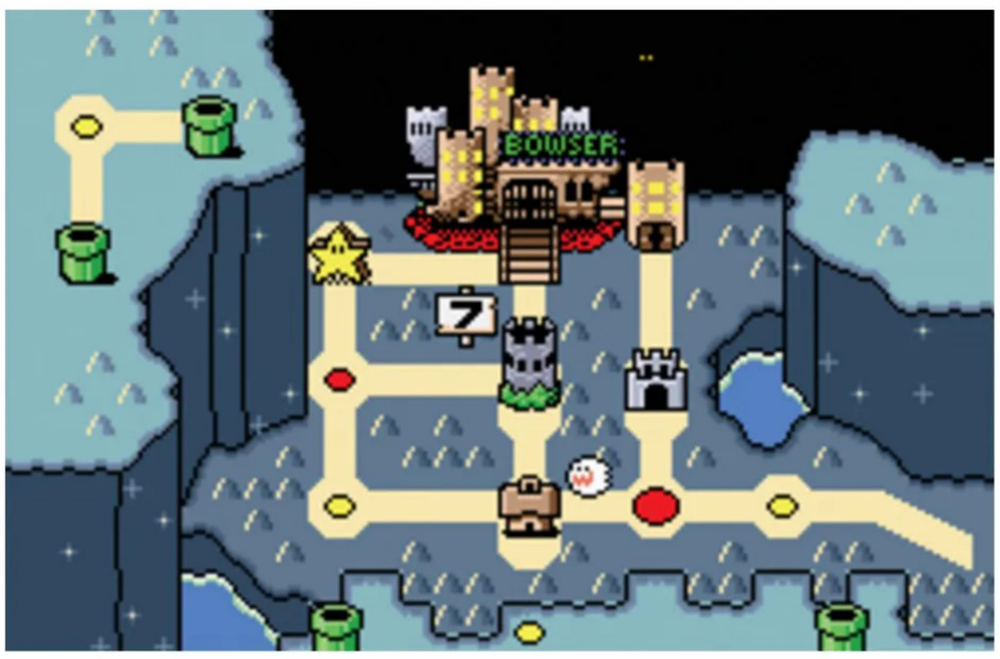
You might find the hidden extra life on your first attempt at World 1-1 – it's easy enough to accidentally find. However, what's important is that you probably won't. You can keep discovering new things in *Mario* games after you think you've mastered them, and this secret is the first indication of that.

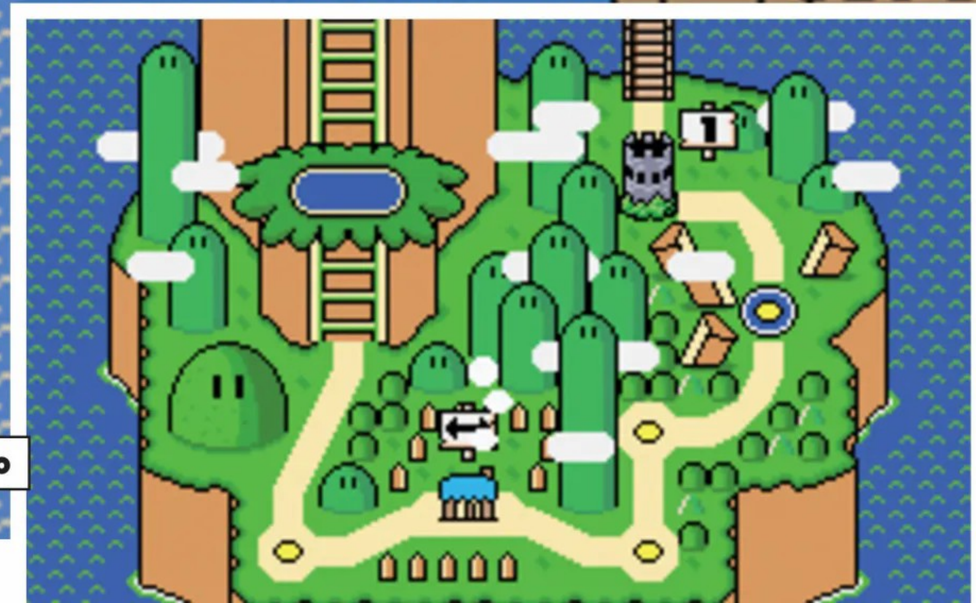
THE WORLD MAP

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario World

Sure, *Super Mario Bros 3* had a world map too, but the one that guides you through Dinosaur Land in *Super Mario World* is a completely different beast. The maps in the previous game had generally been isolated, but after you make your way off Yoshi's Island, you'll get a true sense of the scale of the large, interconnected map of *Super Mario World*. This is also a map that changes and evolves as you journey through the game. Paths open up, bridges are built, Mario ventures into caves and forests – it feels almost alive, such is the level of activity.

The map isn't just well-presented, though. It's an incredibly useful tool for making your way through the game, thanks to the way it is set up. You can see the path you're supposed to take, but there's plenty of room left spare. Luckily, you'll soon find out that the red and yellow dots that represent stages mean something – the red levels have more than one exit, which gives you an idea of how to reveal the secret levels that occupy those seemingly empty areas of the map. But that's all the help the map will afford you, leaving the pleasure of discovery for the player to enjoy.





"It's an interesting question, and there have been so many great moments in the Mario games that choosing one of them seems arbitrary and unfair to the others. For me, the real high point was those first few moments of playing *Super Mario 64*. Entering the third dimension, enjoying the intuitive controls. Running around outside the castle, seeing it all in 3D for the first time, trying out the different kinds of jumps, birds flying from trees as you climbed them. Realising that they had got so much so right on their first attempt and that it was going to be a great game to play. I can't think of another moment like that." **STEVE ELLIS, RARE**

"The first is the snow section on *Super Mario 64*. There are penguins around and the atmosphere of that whole area is top-notch. To cap it all, there is the ice racing section in there that is really a fun break from the jumping mechanic." **STEVE WETHERILL, ODIN SOFTWARE**

MISSION MARIO

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario 64

Super Mario 64 was a game changer. It not only redefined platformers for years to come, but also delivered a fresh new take on Mario's 11-year-old formula. It was magical enough to simply leap through a painting and discover an exciting new world within it, but *Super Mario 64*'s unique missions left an equally memorable impact, giving structure to the game and a sense of place that hadn't been in earlier games. The core mechanics were still there, but now you were racing penguins down slides, launching yourself into the ether in search of goodies and reuniting snowmen with their missing heads. In short you were having the time of your life.

GHOST BUSTING

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario World

16 Ghost Houses give you a break from action platforming, instead showing the versatility of the *Mario* formula by providing players with a mental challenge. From doors hidden behind unbreakable blocks to stages that seem to endlessly loop, the Ghost Houses throw all kinds of unusual challenges at you. Typically, the nature of the brainteasers means that you'll be more threatened by the clock than the slow-moving, shy Boos that populate these stages.

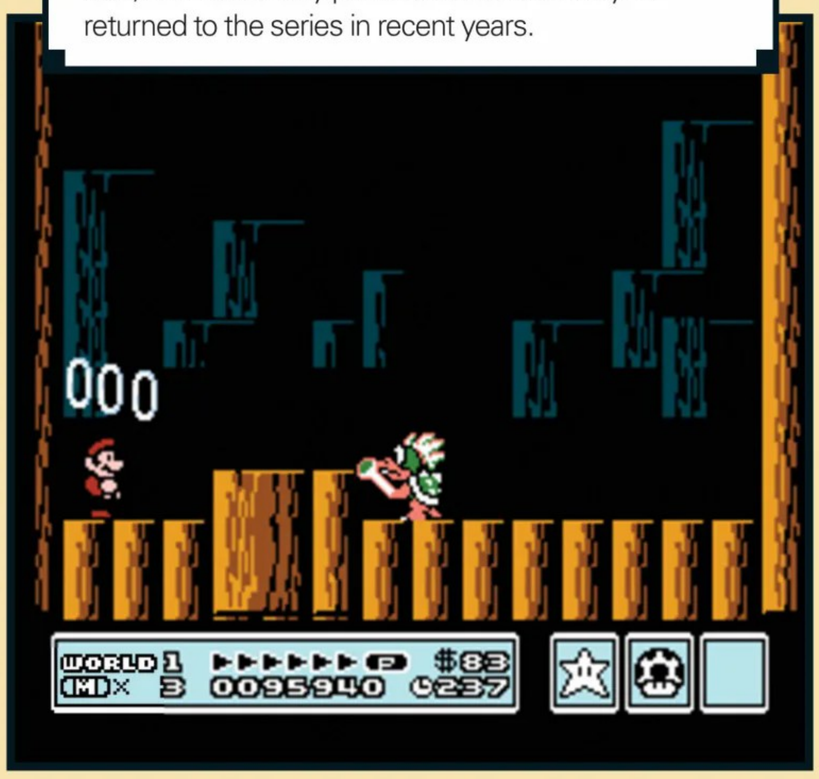
"I could tell you of the time I completed *Super Mario World* on the Super Famicom. It was entirely in Japanese, which meant I didn't know you could throw shells straight up in the air. That resulted in me having to go and get a cape, then make it all the way through the last level without getting hit. On the final screen, things got really tricky. You had to get a Koopa to drop at one side of the screen whilst you made it to the other. Then there was just enough room to run and get up to flight speed, at which point you had to jump and, on the way up, hit the Koopa and grab his shell at the same time. Then you could sail over the top of Bowser and drop the shell on him as normal. Rinse, repeat. Without getting hit - otherwise you'd lose your cape and have to go back to the previous level..."

ALEX TROWERS, BULLFROG

MEETING THE FAMILY

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Bros 3

8 After repeatedly being bested by Mario in the first game, Bowser learned the joys of delegation and decided to reserve himself as a final boss. He's a responsible villain, though – to ensure that Mario still had bosses to fight, he brought in the seven Koopalings to do his dirty work for him. We've got a fair amount of affection for the Koopa kids, and we're very pleased to see that they've returned to the series in recent years.



"When you first fly with the racoon tail in *Super Mario Bros 3* and realise how much of the game has opened up to you."
FLYING_DELOREAN81

"While almost impossible to pick one *Mario* moment above all others, one that does hold a very special place is my first encounter with the Racoon (Tanooki) Suit in *Super Mario Bros 3*. As a pixel pusher, the sheer joy of seeing such an iconic character as our titular plumber suddenly in a fuzzy onesie literally made me grin from ear to ear.

A great moment in a series of games that seldom fails to bring back the childlike gamer in even the oldest of dinosaurs."
SIMON BUTLER, IMAGINE SOFTWARE

WHISTLE BLOWER

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Bros 3

9 Finding the warp zones in *Super Mario Bros* is rewarding but obtaining warp whistles in *Super Mario Bros 3* is even more so, especially because so few are available – just three in the whole game, and all of them within the first two worlds. Our favourite is the first. Find this white block in World 1-3, hold down on the D-pad for a couple of seconds, then run behind the scenery to the end of the stage!

TOAD HOUSE

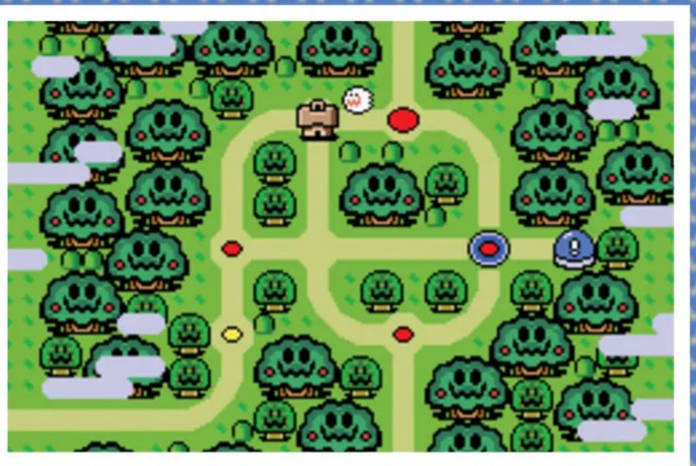
AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Bros 3

10 With its new world map system, *Super Mario Bros 3* opened the series up to between-level events. While we like the enemy encounter mini-stages, we were always much happier to see Toad's friendly face. Whether you were matching cards or simply picking items from a chest, the ability to get a quick break and stock up on items was always most welcome.

SECRETS WITHIN SECRETS

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario World

Making it to Star Road feels very special – the unusual stages and different coloured Yoshis certainly give its stages a different feel to those on the main map. However, the truly special moment comes when you realise that the rabbit hole goes deeper, as the Star Road stages have their own secret exits too! If you find all of them, you can take a trip to the super-secret Special Stages, which will challenge *Super Mario World* experts to the limit.



> *Super Mario World* and finding a secret world within a secret world! My poor little pre-teen brain nearly exploded with excitement.
> JOLLY

> If I was to ever be stuck on a desert island and had one game to choose (and console, of course) I would go with *Super Mario World* and my SNES everytime, so many memorys attached to this game from the first levels to the hidden secrets and even the soundtrack to suit each stage. This could very well be my favourite game of all time.
> JON WELLS, ART EDITOR, RETRO GAMER

TAKING TO THE AIR

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Bros 3

Super Mario Bros might have given Mario power-ups, but *Super Mario Bros 3* was the game that made us fall in love with them and the reason was found in the very first stage. After picking up a Super Leaf, Mario gains ears and a tail to become Raccoon Mario – not only making him cuter, but also granting him the ability to fly! It works just as you'd expect, too. Mario must be running at top speed before you hit jump to initiate flight, meaning that you need a long stretch of 'runway' to get going. However, Raccoon Mario (and later Tanooki Mario) can reach areas that are otherwise totally inaccessible, so you'll try to launch whenever possible. The ability to fly added a lot to *Super Mario Bros 3*, and it's no surprise that flight has been frequently revisited as a theme since.

> "*Super Mario Bros 3*, the Tanooki suit. I played it for ages thinking it was a great attacking move before being shown by a neighbour how to fly. The rest of my *Mario 3* career was attempting to recreate this."
> BITTERTOAD

FLIGHT ITINERARY

After taking to the skies for the first time, Mario decided that the airborne life suited him…

SUPER LEAF
From: Super Mario Bros 3

CAPE
From: Super Mario World

WING CAP
From: Super Mario 64

F.L.U.D.D.
From: Super Mario Sunshine

BEE MUSHROOM
From: Super Mario Galaxy

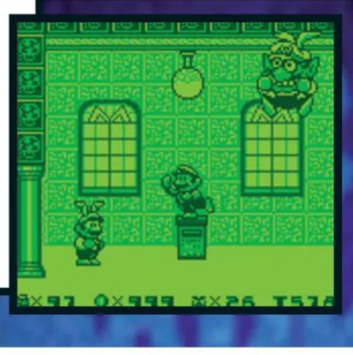
COSTUME PARTY

Mario just loves to dress up – here are some of our favourite outfits he's donned over the years…

MARIO'S DARK SHADOW

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins

While meeting Wario is one of the franchise's most understated moments, it's nevertheless an important one, even if players didn't really know it at the time. When you first encounter him in *Super Mario Land 2* it's as a solid antagonist for the popular plumber, with the portly villain effortlessly standing in for Bowser. He crops up again in several other games, only to become the main protagonist in *Super Mario Land 3*. He then goes on to completely reinvent the mini-game genre with the excellent *WarioWare* series, while continually hassling Mario is numerous adventures, both platformers and otherwise. What a cad.



IT'S A ME! MARIO!

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario 64

It's easy to forget just what an impact Mario made when he appeared on Nintendo's 64-bit system. After 11 years of 2D adventures with the lovable plumber, here he was in full 3D and he looked fantastic. Simply watching Mario follow your cursor around with his eyes was a treat enough upon loading the game, but the real magic came when you realised that you could use that disembodied glove to actually pull at Mario himself, twisting him into all sorts of hilarious positions. It's the first of many unforgettable moments that would help transform *Super Mario 64* into one of the greatest platformers of all time.

"The first time I played *Mario 64* it just felt so revolutionary – Nintendo did such a great job of making the jump to 3D. Mario's control felt amazing – you could have fun just running around, sliding and jumping. It was just the perfect game to launch the N64 with – it looked, sounded and played great."
JOHN PEGG, RARE

"It was late 1996, and a couple of us had bought *Mario 64* on import for our N64 consoles and we challenged each other to see how fast we could beat the game. It ended up being about three weeks for me. Anyway, I'd been playing it for a few hours at a time and in the early hours, one night with lights off, I was really 'in the zone', swimming Mario through an underwater cavern and he ran out of oxygen. He had a very poignant death animation, where he spluttered and then floated limp and lifelessly towards the surface with the camera pulling away from him. It was so sad, I almost cried. I was so emotionally connected to him and his quest. It was a very upsetting and emotional moment. It reminded me of the fact that even whilst the graphics are obviously cartoony and stylised, much like Snow White and Woody from *Toy Story*, it's possible to create fictional characters with really empathy and whilst we've all seen that with animated characters in films, it was the first time I'd felt it for a game character."
ANDREW OLIVER, BLITZ GAMES

SWITCH PALACE

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario World

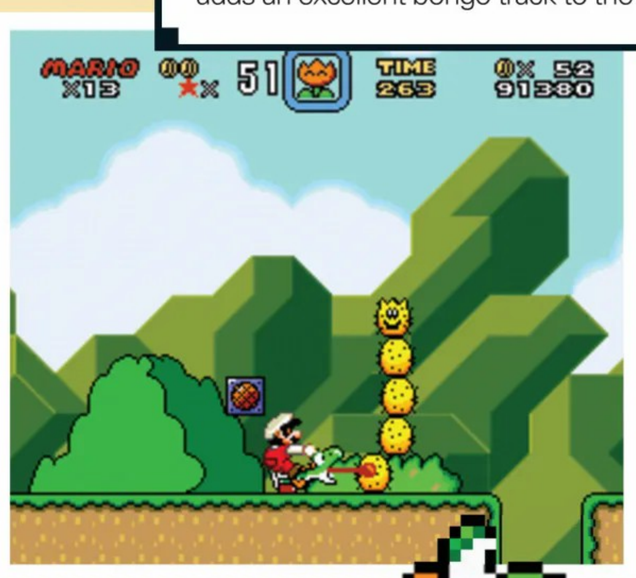
13 As the first game in the series to let you revisit previously beaten stages, *Super Mario World* had to have a compelling reason to bring you back. The Switch Palaces are just that reason – when you find one, not only do you get to enjoy a room full of coins, you activate new blocks in old stages. These open up previously inaccessible paths, changing levels you thought you knew.

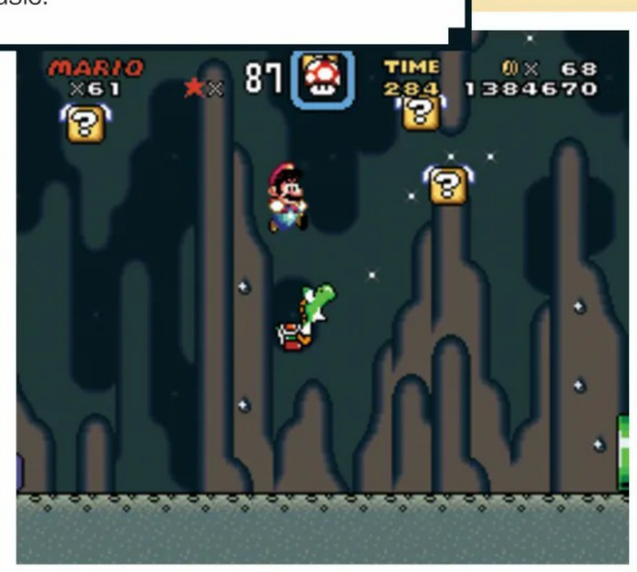
"As with many others, my favourite *Mario* Moment is from *Super Mario World*. It's the first time you entered an underground cave, and specifically how the soundtrack and effects went all echo-y. Don't ask me why that should've stayed with me above something as spectacular as the opening of *Mario 64*. I just remember it feeling really clever, that they'd thought about using audio to provide a sense of space and place... and that the SNES was able to pull it off. It was the moment that I knew I'd spent my money wisely, and was the start of my love affair with Nintendo." PAUL 'MR BIFFO' ROSE, DIGITISER 2000

MEETING YOSHI

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario World

14 The first time you see Yoshi hatch from an egg, you can tell immediately that he's going to be one of Mario's most popular allies. This cute green dinosaur might not look at home with the cast of *Jurassic Park*, but he's a fearsome force, able to swallow many enemies whole and spit them out as projectile attacks. Not only that, but he shields you, gives you the ability to perform a double-jump, and adds an excellent bongo track to the music.





"One of the first levels in *Super Mario World* where you launch a Koopa shell through about eight other Koopas. That never gets old." TIM FITCHES

KOOPA BOWLING

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario World

15 We can't help but love the beginning of *Yoshi's Island 2*. What can you do with one red shell and a whole row of Koopa Troopers? Pick up the shell, bowl the baddies over and earn a boatload of points, as well as a bonus life. Fantastic.

"Oh man I'm not even sure how to pick one! I guess the first time I saw a Door Potion in *SMB2*. What a supremely weird game item!"
ADAM SALTSMAN, ADAM ATOMIC

"My memory has to be playing *Super Mario Land* on the Game Boy in 1989. This was my first *Mario* game, having worked at a games shop that decided to sell the Sega Master System – you weren't allowed to sell Sega AND Nintendo – I had never seen a NES. I had my own Game Boy and this was the game I bought with it. After my first go I became aware of how well laid out and devious the levels were. Once I'd got used to [it] I realised that four hours had passed. I was well and truly addicted and the various tunes had been ingrained into my brain for all time. The game also succeeded at getting family members, who had shown no interest in my previous machine, the Spectrum, bopping baddies and exploring tunnels. A recent replay showed to me that the game had lost none of its playability and still had that 'one more go' factor that it had 26 years ago."
MARK R. JONES, OCEAN SOFTWARE

MALIGNANT MUSHROOMS

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels

5 Some of the cleverest moments in *Super Mario Bros* involve subverting the player's expectations, and this sequel did just that. In the original game, every mushroom was good – in *The Lost Levels*, you need to watch out for the Poison Mushrooms which damage you like an enemy attack.

"My favourite *Mario* moment is finding the Warp Zone at the end of 1-2. You thought you'd hacked the game! My least favourite moment, getting to 4-1 and finding Lakitu waiting with an inexhaustible supply of Spiny eggs to throw at you. I doubt it's a coincidence the two are linked."
STEVE LYCETT, SUMO DIGITAL

SUBMARINE ATTACK

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Land

6 Gunpei Yokoi's handheld *Mario* games offer a distinctive take on the design of the series, staying close to the original formula while introducing new mechanics. We always liked World 2-3, as Mario gets to hop in a submarine and blast away in a shoot-'em-up section. He gets to revisit this in the game too, this time taking to the skies in a plane!

GOING OUT OF BOUNDS

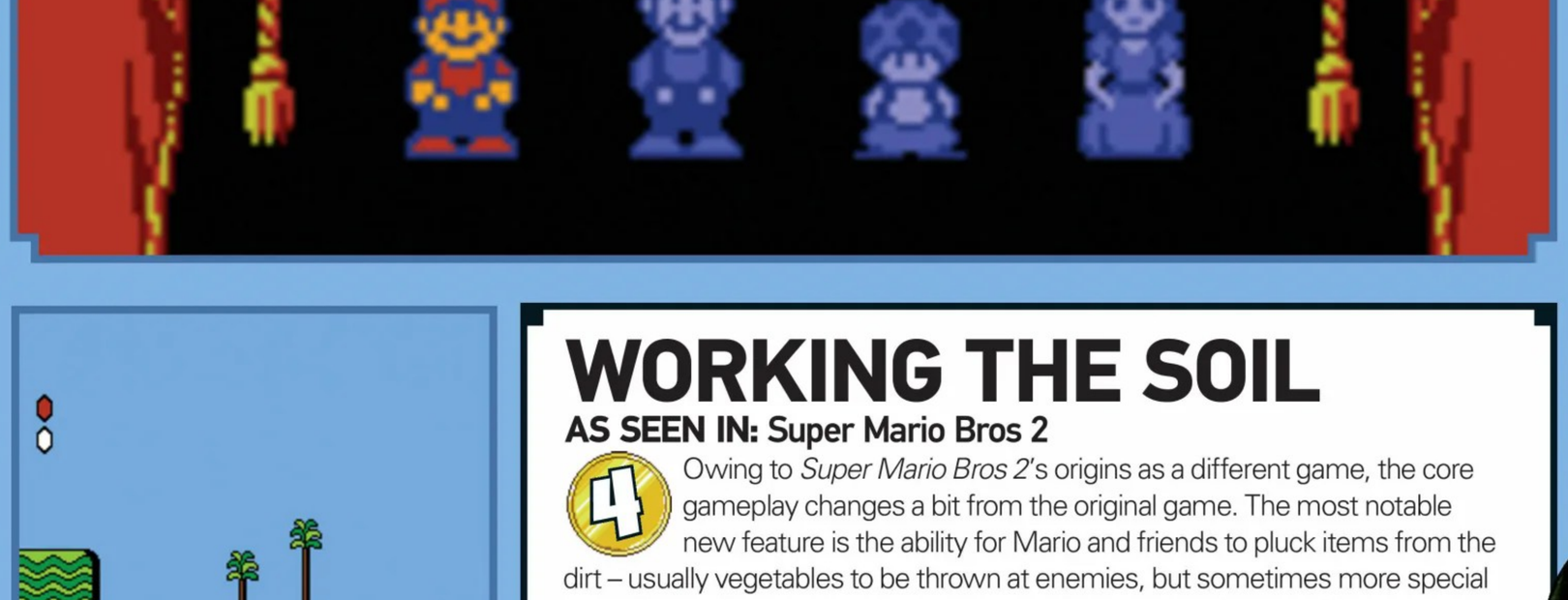
AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Bros

2 Placing the ceiling of *Super Mario Bros*' underground stages below the HUD was a genius move on Nintendo's part, as it makes it look like there's a fixed status bar. As a result, jumping out of the normal play area and running along the top of the screen feels like you're breaking the game – and better yet, if you can make it past the exit pipe you'll reach the Warp Zone.

FOUR WAYS TO PLAY

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Bros. 2

3 Not only does *Super Mario Bros 2* let you play as Mario's friends, it makes doing so very worthwhile as every single one has unique characteristics. Luigi's a bit slower and weaker than Mario, but jumps higher. Toad has a short jump, but is fast and pulls up veggies quickly, while Peach (or Princess Toadstool) has a unique floating jump. It was a joy to discover which one suited you best.



"In 1988, while working at Origin Systems, we had a Japanese Famicom system and I remember playing *Super Mario Bros 2* on it – it was really cool to see Mario again but with blowing wind and leaves! It turns out this version never made it to the US because six months later *Super Mario Bros 2* got to the States and it was the re-skinned *Doki Doki Panic* game (still awesome).

I also remember just how incredibly difficult World 8 was in *Super Mario Bros 3*. The game was incredible, really a tour-de-force of game design, and was perfect in almost all respects. I finally beat it and count it as one of the hardest games I've played."

JOHN ROMERO, ID SOFTWARE

WORKING THE SOIL

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Bros 2

4 Owing to *Super Mario Bros 2*'s origins as a different game, the core gameplay changes a bit from the original game. The most notable new feature is the ability for Mario and friends to pluck items from the dirt – usually vegetables to be thrown at enemies, but sometimes more special items like potions that create doors into subspace or rockets that blast you to the next part of the game. Sure, you can jump on enemies and lift them instead, but even lobbing Shy Guys isn't as fun as a little gardening – the little moment of anticipation as each root is pulled makes the activity rather compulsive.

PLUCK TALES

Here are all the items you can retrieve from the ground in Super Mario Bros 2

> The shock when you jump at pictures and are transformed into a new area the picture ripples as you leap though **BRIAN HEAPS**

BOWSER BY THE TAIL

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario 64

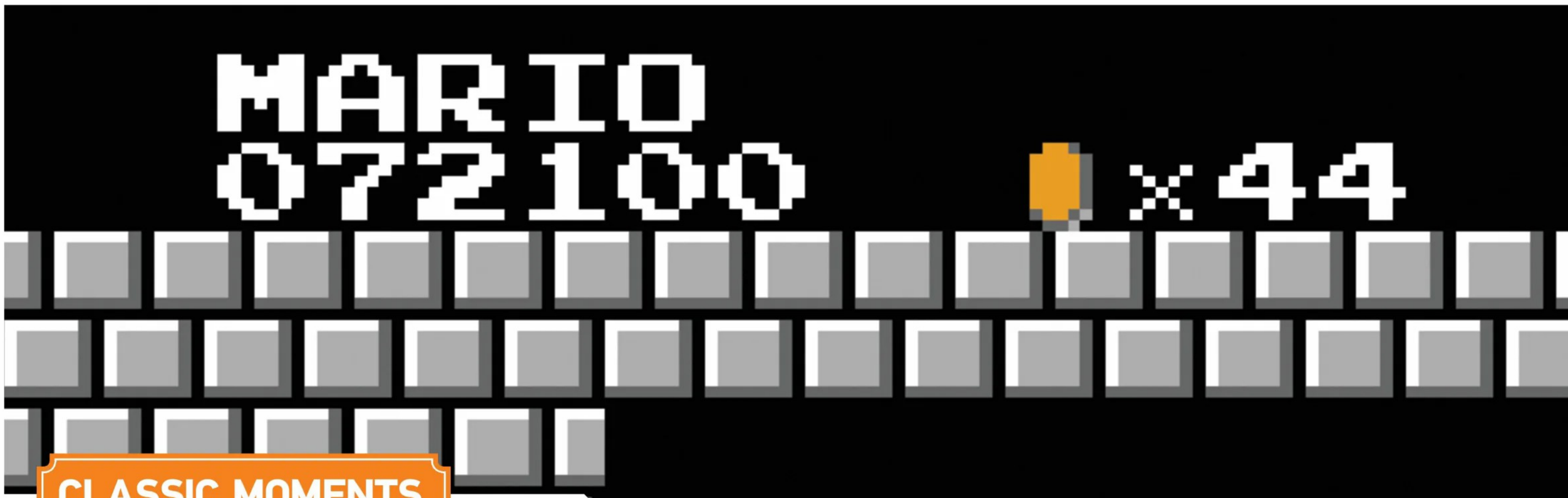
There are few moments in *Super Mario 64* — or any *Mario* game for that matter — that are as satisfying as your first encounter with Bowser. While he was always challenging in earlier games, he was never as menacing as he was in *Super Mario 64*. Being rendered in 3D not only made him imposing, but also gave a better indication of just how big the king of Koopas actually was. A further nice touch comes from the camera that shakes with every gigantic pound of Bowser's feet.

Still, the bigger they are the harder they fall and in *Super Mario 64*, Bowser falls very hard indeed. Initially he seems too powerful, thanks to his imposing size and the gigantic gouts of flame that he can spew out at will, but your 3D incarnation of Mario is super agile and before long you're able to confound the beast and get behind him.

Grabbing hold of Bowser's tail you slowly start swinging the surprised king, faster and faster, until he becomes a whirling dervish of green and yellow. "So long, dear Bowser," shouts Mario as he sends the king hurtling towards the mines that litter the stage. Four collisions later and the Kooper King is suitably cowed, leaving behind a gigantic key so Mario can continue his adventure.

> *Mario 64*. For me this was the first *Mario* game that really drew me into Mario's life perhaps because it was the first time the player actually got to feel as though there actually was a 'Mario World' somewhere in that machine.
>
> When *Mario 64* was released I think there were a lot of 'dark' and gloomy games that were becoming more and more popular, utilising 3D to create shooters. But playing *Mario 64* was a refreshing change, and showed us that games didn't have to be all *Doom* and gloom to be cool. It was such a cool game and inspired many others, myself included. I think that the feel of *Mario 64* inspired myself and a lot of the artists at Rare If you take a look at *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Diddy Kong Racing*, it's clear to see what we'd all been playing!
>
> **KEVIN BAYLISS, PLAYTONIC**

> Playing *Mario 64* for the first time wandering around the castle grounds, getting a feel for the analogue stick. Is there anyone who wasn't blown away by that?
>
> **DEATH'S HEAD**



CLASSIC MOMENTS

Super Mario Bros

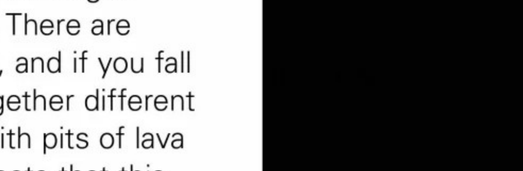
» **PLATFORM:** NES » **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO » **RELEASED:** 1985

Your trek through the first few stages of *Super Mario Bros* has taught you the basics – there are stages above ground and stages underground. There are Koopas and Goombas trying to get you, and if you fall down a hole, you're dead. But stage 1-4 is altogether different – the large castle is far more dangerous, filled with pits of lava and spinning fire barriers. Even the music suggests that this place is not to be trifled with. As you make progress through the stage, fireballs start to shoot in from the right of the screen.

Finally, you meet your nemesis for the first time, Bowser. He's a formidable foe – much larger than the standard-issue grunts, and his jumps and fireballs are harder to predict. You try to jump on him to no avail, and the second encounter ends with a flame-grilled Mario. But the third time you notice the glowing axe behind the fiend and jump over him, destroying the bridge and claiming victory. Nice work!

BIO

Mario Bros had been a reasonably popular arcade game, but *Super Mario Bros* was such a thorough evolution that it left the older game in the dirt. Single-screen platforming was replaced with lengthy scrolling assault courses, taking place in a variety of locations including above ground, on bridges, underwater, underground and a fiendish castle. New enemies and end-of-level bosses provided challenge, and a catchy theme tune would lodge itself in pop culture for decades to come. This was the single best reason to buy a NES during its overseas launch, and remains an iconic classic that is still enjoyable to play today.



"My moment comes from *Mario Sunshine* where you're going about your merry way then Shadow Mario comes out from the ether and pinches your FLUDD just before you enter a level. I spent *ages* trying to beat that hidden level which is set in a void that exists somewhere *Mario 64* and *Sunshine*. I did finish it in the end, my palms were sweaty, my heart was beating and my GameCube controller was never the same..." DREW SLEEP, PRODUCTION EDITOR, RETRO GAMER

MEGA MUSHROOM!

AS SEEN IN: New Super Mario Bros

Check any expectations of subtlety at the door – when Mario gets hold of a Mega Mushroom, he becomes so large that there's only one reasonable course of action. In case you hadn't guessed, that means going on an unstoppable rampage. Invincibility stars are great, but they just let you take out enemies. Mega Mario can smash through everything in his path, from enemies to scenery objects like blocks and pipes.

Of course, being Mega Mario doesn't just feel great. There are some great touches to this too – for example, if you reach the end of a stage as Mega Mario, you can knock down the flagpole. Mario then looks back at it sheepishly. Even better, you're rewarded with extra lives for smashing objects.

"My first home computer encounter with *Mario* was in *Donkey Kong* on the Dragon 32, which was the first game I saw on that machine in two-colour 320x200 mode, which was hi-definition of the day. Apart from the lack of colour it behaved as the arcade original, which probably persuaded me that the Dragon 32 could do the job and led us to choose it as our second platform to code on after the ZX Spectrum. My Dragon 32 conversions of Steve Turner's first three games were all done in that graphics mode.

So you could say that Mario himself put me on the course to programming, without either of us knowing it." ANDREW BRAYBROOK, GRAFTGOLD

OOPS UPSIDE YOUR HEAD

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Galaxy

24

Having accidentally mastered the 3D platformer on its first attempt, Nintendo left itself a mountain to climb with each and every follow-up to *Super Mario 64*. Initial fears that *Galaxy* might fall into that oh-so-common Wii trap of abusing gimmicky controls and suffering as a result were allayed upon finally taking the game for a spin, where we discovered a totally different kind of gimmick – one that actually worked. Jumping mechanics are so integral to the *Mario* experience that relearning how these functioned in full 3D space when each planetoid had its own gravitational pull made for a stellar experience that could keep even platforming veterans on their toes.

"Wind the clock back to 2010 and I'll be totally engrossed in *Super Mario Galaxy*, but this time I'm watching in amazement as my young son somehow masters using the Wiimote and Nunchuk and solving the puzzles in double quick time, yet he's to young to be able to read the screen menus and messages, so I say them out loud for him. Real father and son bonding stuff! He played it for months and months, and still does occasionally."

ARCHER MACLEAN, AWESOME STUDIOS

MULTIPLAYER MADNESS

AS SEEN IN: New Super Mario Bros Wii

25

Although previous *Mario* games had dabbled with multiplayer shenanigans, it wasn't until 2009 that Nintendo really perfected the formulae, allowing four friends to work together to complete the cleverly designed levels that Nintendo had crafted. Despite the cooperative-based gameplay there were still time for arguments as characters were unable to share each other's spaces, meaning it was all too possible to accidentally knock a friend off a ledge to their doom. Did we say accidentally? Sorry, we meant purposely.

The inclusion of additional players does highlight the fact that later *Mario* games seem to be rarely designed around them, but anyone who has chased another player around the screen so that they can knock them into a whole in the bottom of the screen is highly unlikely to care.

"Early on in *Super Mario Galaxy*'s Good Egg Galaxy, there's a capsule-shaped planet with a glass exterior. The genius of the game's design became clear when I smashed my way inside to find a 2D challenge on a rotating stage, complete with gravity shifts. Up until that point, I'd thought it was just another good 3D *Mario* game – afterwards, I realised it was simply revolutionary."

NICK THORPE, SENIOR STAFF WRITER, RETRO GAMER

"I played *Mario 64* in Japanese, on import before it was released in Europe. My most surprising moment was seeing someone else playing it in English some six months or so later. I was horrified how much description there was on how to find each Star – I had assumed this was some sort of story text. I had spent ages trying to find the last few stars!"
DAVID BRABEN, FRONTIER

THE BIGGER THEY COME...

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario 64

Although Shigeru Miyamoto had already dabbled with size distortion in *Super Mario Bros 3*, it made a far bigger impact with the debut of Tiny-Huge Island. Unlike the other worlds of *Super Mario 64*, Tiny-Huge Island could be approached from two start points. One had Mario miniaturised, making the avoidance of piranha plants and goombas even more perilous, while the other turned the tables. Amazingly, despite the huge size difference, teeny weeny monsters would attack Mario with ferocious tenacity, making it even more satisfying when you mashed them underfoot with virtually no effort at all.

"I detested *Mario* when it first came out, the only *Mario* game I actually had any affinity with was *Mario 64*, I loved it, loved the look of it, loved the controls all of it. Running in 3D, Mario tilting ever so slightly as he ran, something *GTA IV* introduced to 'modern' gamers back in 2008. It was brilliant, but that's really my first and last love of things *Mario*." **STEWART GILRAY, JUST ADD WATER**

WORLD 1-4

TIME 197

MORE SUPER MARIO BROS MOMENTS

Knock 'Em Down

The first time you jump on a Koopa, you'll notice that its shell is left behind – and if you run into it, it'll be kicked away. But what is super satisfying is when you realise that the shell has been weaponised. If you sprint after it you can see it taking out rows of enemies in succession, racking up increasing points combos.

A Brief Dip

You might think you've seen everything after the first world of *Super Mario Bros*, but you'd be mistaken. Instead of emerging in the familiar underground, Mario enters a pipe only to splash down into the sea. Marauding fish and squids are a danger to our portly plumber, but if he's got a fire flower he can still use it – yes, underwater!

Jaws Of Death

This one is a feat of pixel-perfect platforming. When running at full speed, Mario can jump right over a pipe with a Piranha Plant extending out of the top if he leaves the ground at just the right spot – he'll ever so slightly overlap with the plant's sprite, but emerge unscathed. You'll probably learn this skill running from Lakitu in World 4-1.

Warp Zone

Sometimes, skipping levels feels a bit like, well… cheating. But *Super Mario Bros* brilliantly incorporates its Warp Zone into the game design, only letting you go as far as the developers want – sometimes a few levels ahead, sometimes just one. It's a secret and you still feel pleased to have discovered it, but only because Miyamoto and the Nintendo team wanted you to.

SO MANY COINS... SO LITTLE TIME...

AS SEEN IN: New Super Mario Bros 2

29

The fact that you can make it through most classic *Mario* stages without collecting more than a few coins would suggest to us that the mascot wasn't in it for the money, but *New Super Mario Bros 2* flipped that notion on its head, and as a result made us look at Mario's currency in a whole new light. Here, the very point of the game is to rack up an insane balance and in a single level, you could easily bag as many coins as you likely would in an entire playthrough of one of the older games. There's something completely mesmerising about seeing levels awash with those dinky yellow coins and it became even more enticing when you were playing with a second player.

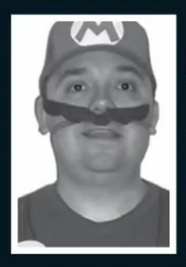
Suddenly a brand new game mechanic introduced a highly competitive element to the series that was not only incredibly fun, but also helped hide the fact that Nintendo's 3DS-based sequel wasn't quite as impressive as the excellent handheld platformer that had proceeded it. The novelty of collecting all those coins was somewhat short-lived, it must by said, but the initial excitement of seeing money *everywhere* was still a welcome change of pace for the series and one of the highlights of Nintendo's portable sequel.

THE HELPFUL GHOSTS

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario 3D World

30

As games grow increasingly complex, their secrets naturally get harder and harder to find. But in its hugely entertaining ghost replay feature, this Wii U stunner found as strong an answer to this issue as Wonder Guide was for that of rising difficulty. As you explore, you'll see the routes taken by other players happening around you. Some may lead you to hidden items or areas, others to shortcuts that help shave precious seconds off your best level times and, even more basic, it allowed for oddly addictive asynchronous multiplayer as you race against others who may not even be online.



"I've always enjoyed the *Mario* games, but it's *3D World* which has become my favourite. My family absolutely loves cats, and *Super Mario 3D World*'s Cat Suit ensured that both my children and wife would participate in multiplayer games. Initially the Cat Suit comes across as a bit of a gimmick, but you soon realise just how versatile it is. It begs you to explore the world as it allows you to cling to and climb walls that you otherwise couldn't access, opening up the seemingly linear levels and proving just how clever Nintendo's design still is. It might be a little chaotic playing Mario games multiplayer, but there's no denying that they're also a lot of fun."

DARRAN JONES, EDITOR, RETRO GAMER

WHAT NEXT?

Who knows what magical moments are going to be around the corner for Mario? *Super Mario Maker* allowed you to make your own stages, while the ability to possess enemies in *Super Mario Odyssey* led to all sorts of crazy shenanigans. It's safe to say that later games are going to be just as much fun as the earlier ones.

"They're all great! I love them all. But actually, the very first game is the most important to me. I played it at a time when I was still unemployed, before starting out somewhere. Playing this, I realised for the first time, 'Oh, there is a game industry. This is something I could realise being creative, and actually conceive works of art.' *Super Mario Bros.* would be my favourite because it actually pushed me into this industry. Otherwise, possibly, without this I wouldn't even have ended up there." **KEIJI INAFUNE, CAPCOM**

WHO NEEDS BOWSER?

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Galaxy 2

26

While it seemingly made use of a lot of the same assets as the original and didn't mess with the near-perfect formula too much, *Galaxy 2* still found ways to innovate and impress, to the point where some would cite it as the better of the two games. It clearly has spectacle on its side – returning players wouldn't get the same sense of freshness from another set of relatively simple levels like those of the first game – and this comes to the fore in some of the incredible boss fights. Mario bosses don't tend to be all that great but the Gobblegut showdown is wonderful, the spherical battlefield evolving as he chews through the planet as the fight draws on.

MARIO THROUGH THE AGES

- SUPER MARIO BROS
- SUPER MARIO BROS 2
- SUPER MARIO BROS 3
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- SUPER MARIO WORLD
- SUPER MARIO LAND 2
- SUPER MARIO 64
- SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE
- NEW SUPER MARIO BROS.
- SUPER MARIO GALAXY
- NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. Wi
- SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2
- SUPER MARIO 3D LAND
- NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. 2
- NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. U
- SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD
- SUPER MARIO MAKER
- SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY

AN ALL-NEW PERSPECTIVE

AS SEEN IN: Super Mario 3D Land

27

Having miraculously mastered the art of 3D level design on its first attempt, Nintendo never had us worried about that aspect of *3D Land*. But the 3DS' primary gimmick did, mainly because we remember the sea of early DS releases that were ruined by attempts to utilize novelty hardware features. To this day, though, *3D Land* remains the only game that uses the handheld's illusion of depth on a gameplay level, with puzzle rooms playing cunning tricks with 3D space. Even elsewhere, though, 3D offered some great moments, really giving a sense of height and depth to moments like this death-defying drop.

"My favorite moment, honestly, is the fun we all had in the arcades playing *Donkey Kong*, and how we all helped the heroic little plumber outsmart the formerly-eponymous monkey and steal the brand. My second favorite moment is every time I hear a sound effect that I know had its origin with *Mario*. *Mario* forever!"

TRIP HAWKINS, ELECTRONIC ARTS

THE CRAZY COIN BOOST

AS SEEN IN: New Super Mario Bros U

28

Mario games have long been the careful, considered other side of the coin to Sonic's high-speed hijinks, but a new mode would look to address this long-standing difference in opinion between the two rivals. Boost Rush was the result of Mario realizing that maybe he *did* have to go fast after all, auto-scrolling stages speeding up the more you lined your pockets with gold. It felt a little like a mobile title – auto-runners are everywhere these days – but with the polish and production values you'd expect from Nintendo, proving that the developer wasn't nearly as out of touch with modern gaming as its critics might claim.

MASTERING FLUDD

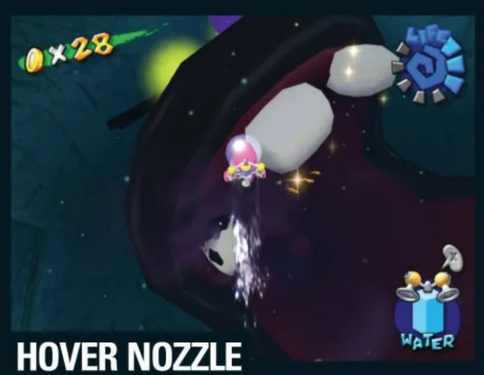
AS SEEN IN: Super Mario Sunshine

22

It's fair to say that a genre-defining game like *Super Mario 64* would be a particularly hard act to follow – just how do you make a sequel to one of the best games of all time? If you're Nintendo, you take the game in a new direction with the use of a versatile gadget. Whether he's cleaning graffiti off the walls of Isle Delfino or blasting the plaque off the teeth of an angry eel, Mario spends most of his time in the game using FLUDD.

The water-powered gadget initially serves Mario as an eco-friendly weapon, but by the end of the game you'll have encountered different nozzles which allow him to hover, blast into the air and run at speeds that would challenge even a certain blue hedgehog. These abilities allowed us to fling Mario around Delfino Island with the kind of speed and style we'd never had access to before.

"Although I'd played *Super Mario World* and *Mario 64* to their absolute limit, *Super Mario Sunshine* was the first in the series that I wanted to explore for all its worth. It had the three-dimensional splendour of *Mario 64*, plus the design intricacies of *Super Mario World*. Wherever I took Mario, I was usually rewarded, constantly memorising cool routes through the maps, practicing for coin runs at speed or to gain access to the next secret area. I can still remember where I found my final Blue Coin; it was such a moment of triumph. When I discovered that Yoshi was in there too, I was completely in love. While *Super Mario Galaxy* showed more overtly that Nintendo could still conceive whacky concepts that are fun for all to enjoy, in *Super Mario Sunshine* it proved that it was matchless for creating impeccably produced, masterfully designed worlds that came alive in the player's hands." PAUL DAVIES, JOURNALIST



HOVER NOZZLE

■ With powerful twin jets of water, Mario can sustain mid-air flight for a few seconds. Not only does that let him cover gaps, it's also perfect for cleaning from above.

SQUIRT NOZZLE

■ A versatile attachment used for cleaning up graffiti, shooting at enemies, putting out fires and all manner of other tasks which require you to squirt water at things.

TURBO NOZZLE

■ If you've ever seen someone using a fire extinguisher to propel themselves, you'll know what's coming here – Mario uses a jetstream to sprint at high speeds.

ROCKET NOZZLE

■ If you need to reach high places and Mario's little legs won't push him far enough, one high-pressure blast of water will send you soaring into the stratosphere.

MR VIDEO GAME

The complete history of Mario

To celebrate Nintendo's most popular mascot, Retro Gamer asks reknowned industry legends to offer up their memories of the character and gives you the complete lowdown on the plumber's career from Popeye replacement to cultural icon

RLD 1-1 TIME 303

Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels

THE DARK SOULS OF MY YOUTH

» FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM » 1986 » NINTENDO

World 1-1 in the original *Super Mario Bros* is a masterclass in level design. It teaches you all you need to know about the game, from how to squash Goombas to jumping as high as you can to reach the end-of-level flag.

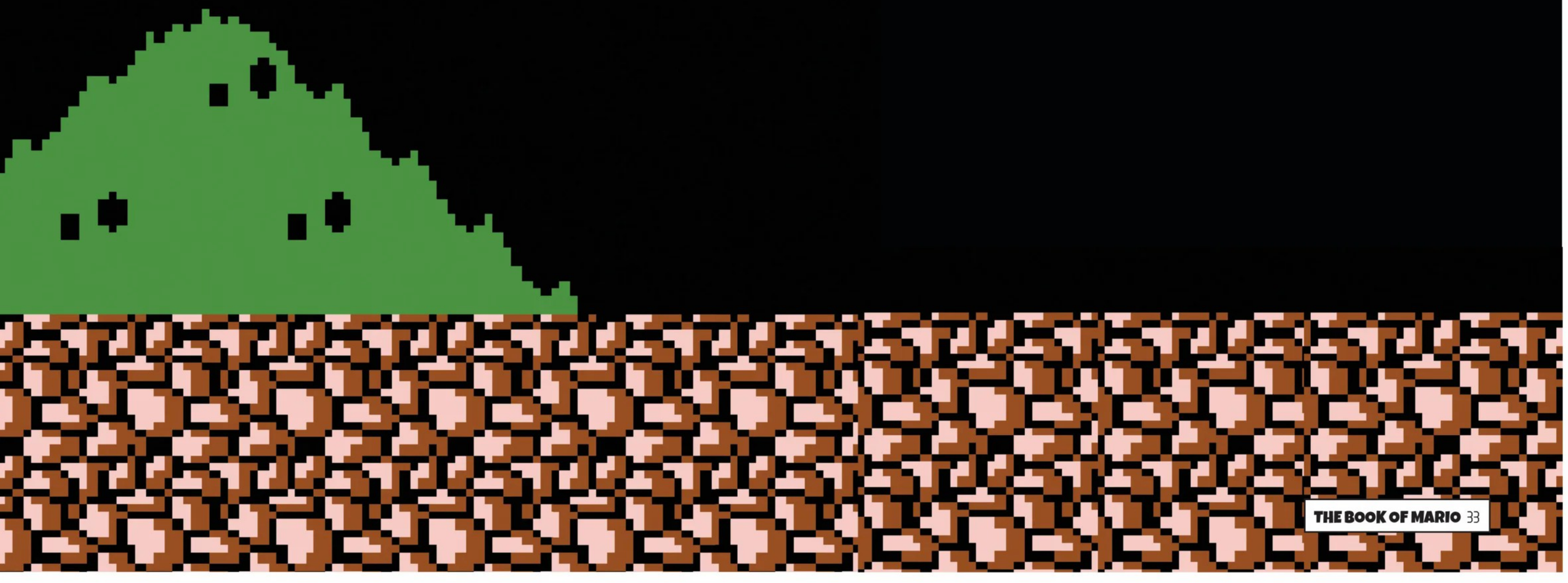
World 1-1 in *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels* does something similar, but with a twist. It's an unforgiving gauntlet showcasing that the game's infamy is true: it's hard as balls. The first power-up is hidden in a brick block, and must be dexterously bounced so Mario can grab it. The second pick-up, the Poison Mushroom, subverts the whole power-up concept, hurting the little plumber rather than making him grow.

The rest of the level is a demonstration that the developers weren't interested in crafting a gentle difficulty curve. Dastardly enemy placement demands pixel-perfect jumping, and some of the other power-ups are cruelly placed – one Mushroom baits you to grab it midair over a gap, killing Mario's momentum and making him plunge into the chasm.

Suffice to say, as a youngster I never got far in *The Lost Levels*, and gave up on it pretty instantaneously, favouring to just go back to the original *Super Mario Bros* in defeat.

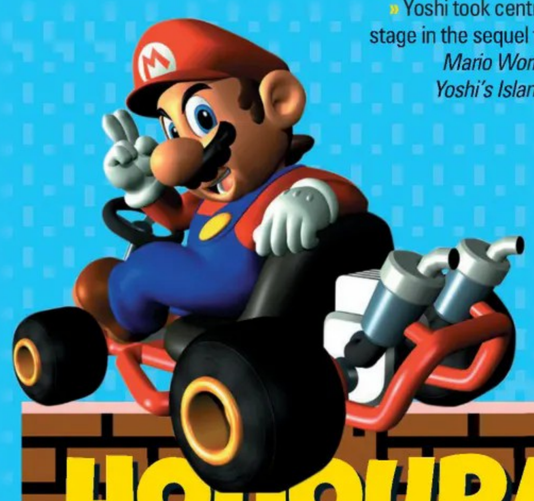
Today, with modern 'difficult' games such as *Dark Souls* and *Meat Boy* under my belt, I decided to return to correct my shame. I wanted to set the record straight and prove to myself that my skills as a gamer have grown in the 20-odd years since I last encountered the Level One From Hell. Of course, it still kicks my ass. I plugged away at the *Lost Levels*' World 1-1 for about two hours before I eventually snatched that end-of-level flag, my palms sweaty and my mouth full of words so profane my ancestors were spinning in their tombs.

It's a bittersweet victory though, because soon after I had vanquished 1-1, World 1-2 reared its ugly underground head. Then 1-3 came with its awful falling platforms, yet 1-4, despite being a Bowser level, is a surprising cakewalk. World 2, however, made me do something I hadn't done in two decades – I rage-quitted out. Well, some things never change, eh? Maybe when I'm in my sixties, I'll finally rescue Peach… ✱



"SMB3 was unveiled like the most brilliant objet d'art in history. It's actually close"

» Yoshi took centre stage in the sequel to *Mario World*, *Yoshi's Island*.



Steve Lycett
Sumo Digital

Boringly, I'll have to plump for *Super Mario World* as my favourite *Mario* game. I got a SNES for my 18th birthday, and lost weeks of my life hunting down all the hidden exits, completing Star Road and then rinsing it twice for the second credits sequence. An amazing game that's clearly ageing better than I am! I think his appeal simply boils down to quality. Bar the odd exception, if it's got 'Mario' in the title you know you'll be getting something that's been built with love, care and attention to detail, and will provide you with hours of fun. I'll happily buy a *Mario* title without reading a single review. Nintendo will always deliver the goods!

Ralph Baer Creator of videogames

To me, Mario is a living presence. I still have the original NES and the *Duck Hunt/Mario* cart that goes with it. Over the decades I have demonstrated interacting physically with the *Duck Hunt* game in the manner of today's Wii games. As has been so often the case, I was 20 years too early with those concepts. Meanwhile, who can resist playing the original *Mario* game when that old TV set is turned on in my demo area and I'm not bringing down those ducks by lobbing something physical at them?

MARIO MEMORIES

Philip and Andrew Oliver
Co-Founders Blitz Software

PO: We first saw Mario appear in the *Donkey Kong* arcade game in 1981. A few years later, in 1988, we went to the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas and were stunned by the magnitude of the games industry and the size of Nintendo's presence. And at the heart of it all was Mario. At that time, *Super Mario Bros* was at its height on the NES – I think they'd sold in the region of 20 million copies, which was incredible.

AO: I remember seeing *Mario Bros* on a Japanese imported NES in about 1986. I remember it looking clean, slick and very playable. And best of all, it was instantly easily accessible. The first time I saw Mario as a character was in the arcade game *Donkey Kong*. Back then he didn't strike me as a brilliant character, but he always starred in brilliant games.

PO: All the Mario games are great. I guess we played the original a fair bit, but it was *Super Mario 64* that proved to the world that character games work better in 3D. Andrew will definitely go for *Mario Kart*, as it's his all-time favourite game! It's up there near the top with me too.

AO: Mario represents games of brilliant gameplay. He's also had a lot of work done on his 'personality', as the graphical powers of machines have been updated. Each revision has been very skilfully managed and has served to embellish and deepen Mario's qualities – they've been careful never to change his persona fundamentally, so the Mario today is essentially the same guy as the Mario of the Eighties.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

Here are some of the more unusual Mario games, which aren't part of the Super Mario canon

MARIO CLASH
VIRTUAL BOY
■ This red-looking 3D redux of the original *Mario Bros* coin-op was the first of two *Mario* games released for the Virtual Boy, the other being *Mario Tennis*. It's also the first ever 3D *Mario* game, if you discount *Super Mario Kart*.

ALLEYWAY
GAME BOY
■ Although not really a *Mario* game per se, this decent *Breakout* clone saw Mario piloting the game's bat. You couldn't actually tell this from the in-game graphics, mind, but he's there on the front of the box art, sporting some natty overalls.

MARIO PAINT
SUPER NINTENDO
■ One of the few games to use the Super Nintendo's mouse peripheral, which came as a pack-in with the game, this artistic spin-off allowed budding artists to create drawings, stamps and animations and then set them to sounds using a music generator.

HOTEL MARIO
PHILLIPS CD-I
■ Often cited as being the worst *Mario* game ever. This CD-i puzzle title was a waste product from the messy Super Nintendo CD saga and tasked players with rescuing Princess Toadstool by closing a whole bunch of doors, for reasons never explained.

ALL NIGHT NIPPON SUPER MARIO BROS
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
■ This game would be considered one of the most bizarre *Mario* clones to find release, were it not released by Nintendo. This *Super Mario Bros/Lost Levels* fusion featured DJs from a popular Japanese radio show.

MARIO EDUCATION GAMES
NES, SNES, PC
■ The plumber also appeared in a series of educational games. These included the geography-themed *Mario Is Missing!*; the typing trainer, *Mario Teaches Typing*; and *Mario's Time Machine*, a thinly veiled history lesson.

SUPER MARIO EXCITEBIKE
SUPER NINTENDO (SATELLAVIEW)
■ Mario and friends appeared in this little-known *Excitebike* title, which meshed together *Mario Kart* with motocross. Released in four parts, it was only available through the Satellaview service.

MR. VIDEO GAME

PROFESSIONS OF A PLUMBER

The versatile hero has appeared in a string of occupational cameos for Nintendo over the years...

CARPENTER

Donkey Kong 1981

Mario's first ever job was as a mallet-wielding carpenter in *Donkey Kong*. It's likely that his profession was inspired by the everyman-type scenarios on which Nintendo based many of its Game & Watch titles.

PLUMBER

Mario Bros 1983

After a two-year stint working as a carpenter, Mario turned his talents to plumbing – as well as the odd bit of pest extermination too – for *Mario Bros*. He kept the role for the subsequent *Super Mario Bros* series.

UMPIRE

Tennis 1984

Mario earned extra cash at weekends working as a tennis umpire. Later in life he decided to take up the sport himself when he realised that more money was to be had playing than interfering.

REFEREE

Punch-Out!! 1987

Following a successful spell as a tennis umpire, Mario caught the eye of the Nintendo Boxing Commission and was approached to work as a referee in the Famicom/NES version of *Punch-Out!!*.

DOCTOR

Dr Mario 1990

Making a mint working as a boxing ref, Mario left labouring to go to medical school. It took him just two years to complete his doctorate – earning him a place in *Guinness World Records*.

GOLFER

NES Open Tournament Golf 1991

Like most doctors, Mario found that the best way to relax after a busy day in surgery was to smash a ball into a tiny hole.

MARIO MEMORIES

Jim Bagley
Classic Spectrum coder

I first saw Mario in the local arcade halls in New Brighton roughly around 1981 when *Donkey Kong* was released. *Donkey Kong* is and always will be a classic, and a great game to boot, but I can't help but admire so many other *Mario* games. *Super Mario Bros* is another fantastic *Mario* game that even to this day I like to play – even though my nephew completed it before I did! And what favourite *Mario* list would be complete without *Mario Kart*? I loved the N64 version the most, because my nephew, niece, sister and I used to play it at the weekends with riotous laughter, especially when zapping someone on the jump in Wario Stadium. And I can't go without saying *New Super Mario Bros*. I also loved it, again, because of the original features, like being able to grow huge and sprint through the level. Out of those four, those being my favourites, if I had to choose one... I'm not sure I can! They all have a huge place in my heart. Why has Mario remained so enduring? Well because he's constantly re-inventing himself, changing with the times, and because Shigeru Miyamoto is simply a genius.

John Carmack
Co-Founder id Software

I have followed Mario since the *Donkey Kong* days, and id Software was pretty much launched on the merits of an internal clone of *Super Mario Bros 3*. I was away for a while after *Super Mario 64*, but the last few years with my son have brought me back into the fold – we just collected our 66th star on *Super Mario Galaxy 2* last night, and we have gone back through all the old games. Still fun after all these years. Domo arigato, Miyamoto-san!

Kevin Toms
Creator of Football Manager

I remember my first recollection of Mario being on the original Nintendo cartridge machine. Squat, cute character, red hat comes to mind. Probably I would go for *Mario Kart* on the Nintendo 64 as my *Mario* game. His lasting appeal is down to the personality he puts across: an upbeat, likable, jolly man. Most people would get on with someone like that. So he annoys no one!

» Hudson Soft released two peculiar variants of *Mario Bros* for Japanese home computers.

» The original *SMB* still plays great today. We should know – we played it yesterday.

MR. VIDEOGAME

MARIO MEMORIES

Jon Hare
Co-Founder Sensible Software

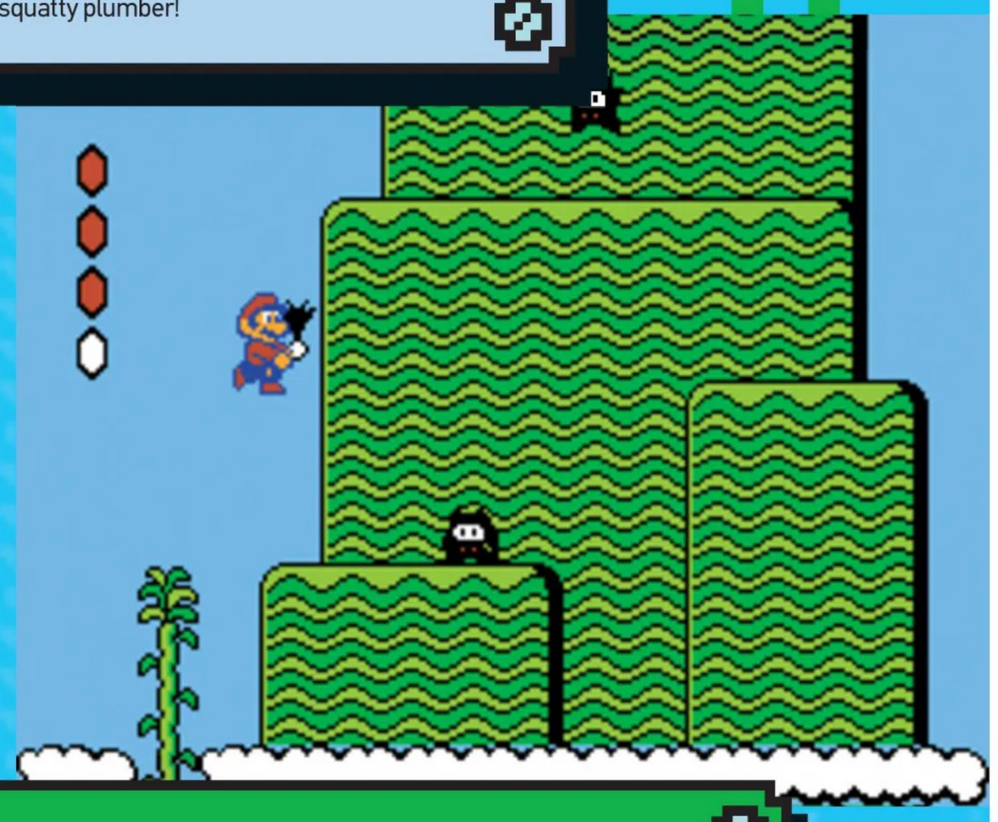
First time I saw Mario was *Donkey Kong* in the arcades in about 1980. I didn't focus on the character much, to be honest – nothing that special. I thought the monkey was the best thing in the game. My all-time favourite *Mario* game has to be *Mario Golf* on the N64. It just has the most perfectly tuned learning curve ever. I spent a whole year trying to win every trophy and kept missing the final one by just one shot. Next best titles would be *Mario 64* and *Mario Kart*. I think Mario endures because he is a really good everyman character, funny but not too irritating, and he has an army of fellow characters that add a lot to him. Miyamoto is the only game designer that I look up to.

MARIO MEMORIES

Scott Miller
Founder of Apogee Software

I first remember Mario playing *Donkey Kong*, of course! When I first discovered this game in an arcade I knew it had something special about it, interesting characters, unique gameplay, variety, and it was a deeply polished game. From the get-go I knew it was the start of a new era, but no one could have guessed the staying power of this squatty plumber!

» If you think this game looks a lot like *SMB2*, that's because 95 per cent of it is.



Alex Trowers
Designer of classic Bullfrog games

I suppose the first time I saw Mario in action was in *Super Mario Bros*, but that's only because the Mario in *Donkey Kong* was called Jumpman. I found *SMB* a bit meh – despite the knocking-things-over-from-underneath mechanic and a two-player option, the whole thing felt a little repetitive. I loved *Donkey Kong* in the arcades, though, and the ColecoVision version, which was the scene of some epic high-score battles between my brother, my mum and I. I can also remember a version of *Super Mario 3* on an old Nintendo Play Choice 10 machine in a local kebab shop. That was entertaining. Suddenly Mario could do all manner of interesting things and that was quite appealing. My favourite *Mario* game is a toss-up between *Super Mario World* on the Super Famicom and *Super Mario 64* on the N64. Some guys from Imagineer brought a Super Famicom over around the time of the Japanese launch and lent it to us. It had two games: *F-Zero* and *Super Mario World*. We played them both pretty religiously, to the extent that we managed to overheat and blow up the console.

Super Mario World was one of the first games I completed in Japanese despite there being a whole ton of stuff that Mario could do. Of course, I couldn't read any of the hints, meaning I missed the one about being able to throw shells up in the air. This meant that to complete the final boss, I had to get the cape on an earlier level and make it through the last castle without getting hit. Once at the boss stage, I had to wait on one side of the screen for him to drop a Koopa before running along, jumping, hitting the thing and grabbing the shell all in one go before using the momentum to fly up to the top of the screen and dropping the shell on him from above. I remember thinking it was a bit tricky at the time but I put it down to just being the end of the game.

John Romero
Co-Founder of id Software

The first time I saw Mario in action, I was at an arcade in Roseville, California, called Supercade. It was a weekend in 1981 and my friend Robert was with me. At this time in 1981, new games were showing up every week. The arcades were the most exciting places in the world. And in this particular arcade, this particular weekend, was a new game called *Donkey Kong*. We went up to the game, dropped in our quarters, and lost ourselves for several hours. When the smoke cleared, we had found a new favourite game and a favourite carpenter named Jumpman, who would be renamed in four years to the familiar name: Mario. We loved Mario's pixelated figure, his cute animations and cuter sound effects. His job was to rescue the princess and put out fire with a mallet. We loved the ridiculousness of it, and it fit in perfectly with the extreme abstractness of games of that time. For me, *Super Mario 3* was the pinnacle. It was just so epic. That game pushed the original NES to the extreme. The cartridge was packed to the limit with data – the game was huge at the time. And it took a while to play through. I was playing it in my Gamer's Edge office next to John Carmack as he coded.

often mistaken for Mario, owing to his stark resemblance to Nintendo's mascot.

SUPER MARIO... FINALLY

Super Mario Bros was, in many respects, the natural next step for the main series to take. It took the popular 'rescue the girl' premise of *Donkey Kong*, applied it to the theme and two-player mode – albeit not simultaneous this time – introduced in *Mario Bros*, and then stretched the gameplay into a revolutionary side-scrolling platform game. Set in the fantasy fungal world of the Mushroom Kingdom, the 'Super' prefix came from the brothers' peculiar reaction to ingesting magic mushrooms, which took the form of power-ups in the game. Eating a mushroom would cause Mario and Luigi to grow in size, this growth spurt essentially acting like a shield but at the cost of making them easier for enemies to hit. And while in this state the eating of a Fire Flower power-up would make the plumbers truly super-powered, dressing them in lustrous white overalls and giving them the ability to lob fireballs.

Speaking in 1991's *Mario Mania Player's Guide*, Miyamoto revealed how the brothers' iconic growth spurt ability in the game came about: "We developed programming techniques that allowed us to create a larger character than we originally thought possible. At first, we planned to make the game so that the player was always 'big' Mario, but eventually, we came up with the idea for the power-up mushroom to make Mario Super."

Super Mario Bros was praised for its innovative gameplay, great visuals, catchy music, super-smooth scrolling, and wealth of secrets to discover – the most notable of which saw Mario actually breaking out of his own videogame in World 1-2; a truly mind-bending concept at the time, made even more impressive by the fact that doing so rewarded the player with the opportunity to warp to later levels in the game.

Selling over 40 million copies, *Super Mario Bros*' popularity can be largely attributed to the success of the Famicom/NES, and thus for also playing a key role in helping to resurrect the console industry in North America following its crash in 1983. In fact, *Super Mario Bros* currently stands as the second bestselling videogame of all time, only topped by *Wii Sports Resort* last year, demonstrating the sheer impact that this single game had on the games industry.

But *Super Mario Bros* wasn't the only *Mario* title released in 1985. The little-known NES game *Wrecking Crew* saw Mario continue in the tradition of his earlier arcade-style games. Rearmed with his trusty carpenter's hammer, and accompanied by Luigi, the game was a fun mix of smash-'em-up and puzzle

To fully appreciate why Mario is still the videogame industry's most recognised, popular and enduring character, you have to look back to the early days of videogames. Mario remains the poster child for a time where everything about them felt fresh, innovative and new, and these newfangled virtual worlds sought only to be linked to ours through the computers and consoles that projected them and the talented visionaries who imagined them. With realism and trends now sitting where fun and creativity once ruled, today's industry is looking a much different place to one that Nintendo was helping to rebuild way back in the Eighties.

With every familiar-looking sandbox RPG-lite shooter that finds release, it becomes ever apparent that this industry has, in many ways, started to fold in on itself. The insane budgets required to build the games of today mean that now only a small handful of developers and publishers have the financial means to call the shots, game genres seem to be melding together, and despite now being able to utilise gazillions of colours, games are looking a little less colourful. Why the Wii currently stands as the triumphant console of this generation, and *Super Mario Galaxy 2* has scooped universal acclaim, should be obvious to anyone who enjoyed playing videogames throughout the Eighties and Nineties. Nintendo has proven, once again, that fun and creativity are king.

It's for this reason why most gamers can instantly recall the first time they ever saw Mario in action. He takes them back to an evergreen era for videogames, a time with which he has now become synonymous. For many of you reading this, we suspect that your first experience came from playing *Donkey Kong* in arcades, or on home computers and consoles. At this inaugural point in his career, Mario was known by the more literal-sounding name of Jumpman, played a bit of an antihero, and worked as a carpenter instead of the heroic plumber we all know him as today. However, while Mario's personality, name and occupation would come to change quite quickly following his gaming debut in 1981, the distinct look of the character was settled on almost immediately by his creator, Shigeru Miyamoto, and has only really ever been refined, never changed, over the years.

As was the practice in the early days of game design, Mario was borne out from the technical limitations of his time. The character was given his signature flat cap owing to the fact that it would save Miyamoto the headache of animating hair, a large nose to make him look instantly more human, bright red coveralls to help him stand out against *Donkey Kong*'s dark backgrounds, and a moustache instead of a mouth for similar reasons. But Mario's creation also came about through an

SUPER MARIO HIGHLIGHTS

1985 SUPER MARIO BROS

1986 SUPER MARIO BROS THE LOST LEVELS

1988 (USA) SUPER MARIO BROS 2

1988 SUPER MARIO BROS 3

1989 SUPER MARIO LAND

1990 SUPER MARIO WORLD

1992 SUPER MARIO LAND 2: 6 GOLDEN COINS

1995 SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHIS ISLAND

1996 SUPER MARIO 64

2002 SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

2006 NEW SUPER MARIO BROS

2007 SUPER MARIO GALAXY

2009 NEW SUPER MARIO BROS WII

2010 SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2

» Mario made his debut in *Donkey Kong*, where it was DK hogging the limelight for Nintendo.

element of luck and good fortune – although it probably didn't seem that way to Nintendo at the time.

'I'LL SAVE YER, LADY!'

Before *Donkey Kong* was even considered, Shigeru Miyamoto had aims to create a new arcade game starring the characters from the popular King Features Syndicate cartoon, *Popeye*. But when Nintendo failed to obtain the licence, Miyamoto was forced to come up with three central characters of his own. And, after taking pretty obvious inspiration from the 1933 stop-motion monster classic, *King Kong*, he came up with the characters Jumpman, Lady and Donkey Kong to substitute the roles of Popeye, Olive Oyl and Bluto, respectively.

When the time came for *Donkey Kong* to ship to North America, however, it was decided that Jumpman should be renamed during the localisation process. Even then, Nintendo's intention was to turn Mario into a mascot-type character by having him appear in many of Miyamoto's subsequent videogames. With this idea in mind, the first new name that Nintendo would settle on for Jumpman was 'Mr Video'. It was a name clearly derived from Nintendo's first ever gaming mascot, Mr Game & Watch.

However, in what became one of the videogame industry's most bizarre anecdotes, Jumpman's name would change once again. The tale goes that, at the time when Nintendo of America (NOA) was trying to gain a foothold in North America, it was renting a warehouse from an Italian construction tycoon named Mario Segale. Segale was said to have looked remarkably similar to Jumpman, and when NOA's president at the time, Minoru Arakawa, realised the coincidence, Jumpman was nicknamed Mario and the name stuck. What makes the story all the more ironic is the fact that Mario Segale's business was construction, an industry that played a prominent role in the look of *Donkey Kong*'s stages. We can neither confirm nor deny whether Segale once owned a giant gorilla that he would occasionally mistreat, though we're guessing that it was highly unlikely.

With the character renamed, Lady rechristened Pauline, and the localisation process complete, Nintendo pushed *Donkey Kong* out onto the US market, where it became a huge success. And with the millions of dollars it earned, the company was able to fund development of its first true videogame console, the Famicom. But it was Donkey Kong, not Mario, who was gaining the most celebrity for Nintendo. Despite the fact that the big dumb ape was assigned the role of big dumb antagonist in *Donkey Kong*, his domineering presence and cartoon qualities made him a clear standout character in the game. And it is perhaps for this reason why Mario was then made to play villain in the game's 1982 sequel, *Donkey Kong Jr.*

That said, Nintendo, obviously not wanting to turn its character into an out-and-out baddie, did give Mario his very own game in the same year, plonking him back in the saddle of hero and gifting him a green coverall-wearing brother called Luigi into the bargain. The game in question, *Mario Bros*, was a single-screen action platformer that looked and played similar to the earlier Williams arcade game *Joust*. It saw Mario and his brother battle through 'phases' of enemy attacks inside a New York sewer, and was the first game to ever depict the brothers as plumbers – it's believed that this was done simply to explain the game's culvert setting. However, with its premise finding the pair trying to prevent an infestation of insect and reptilian pests escaping into the city, the brothers are clearly acting more like exterminators in the game. Nevertheless, as well as portraying the brothers as plumbers, *Mario Bros* also introduced a few common enemy types too, such as Shellcreepers – a precursor to Koopa Troopas – and the annoying spike-shelled foes, the Spinies. It also established the idea of having the brothers collect coins through bonus rounds, as well as the concept of brick-punching and unconscious-enemy toe-punting, all of which would become staples of the *Mario* series.

» Who can forget this trick in World 1-2? Who was it that said cheating doesn't pay? Someone who'd never played *Super Mario Bros*, clearly.

Mario Bros received a lukewarm arcade reception, certainly nothing in the same league as *Donkey Kong*, but later proved to be a popular release for the NES in North America. Two variants of the game were also developed by Hudson Soft, under licence from Nintendo. Released exclusively on Japanese home computers, the games featured all-new original stages and gameplay mechanics. The first, *Mario Bros Special*, was an interesting update of the original game that saw players having to fight their way to exit points at the top of each stage, while the second title, *Punch Ball Mario Bros*, was a quirky dodgeball-inspired iteration that saw the brothers punching balls at their subterranean foes and hitting switches. Hudson Soft also later released its own version of *Super Mario Bros*. Titled *Super Mario Bros Special*, this unfairly punishing home computer version featured all-new levels, hair-pulling level design and maddening flick-screen scrolling. In fact, the dodgy scrolling mars the experience so much that it shows just how important a factor scrolling actually played in *Super Mario Bros*' ultimate success.

But we're jumping ahead of ourselves a bit here, as Mario hadn't quite gone 'super' just yet. In fact, while it's debatable that Miyamoto dabbled with the idea of giving Mario enhanced powers in *Mario Bros* by finally giving him the ability to survive a fall – he wasn't capable of bending his knees in *Donkey Kong* – it wasn't really until the release of *Super Mario Bros* in 1985 that the legendary game designer gave his creation real super powers. Before reaching this watershed moment, though, the character could be seen busily living up to his 'Mr Video' duties. The multipurpose butterball could be seen popping up in a bonus stage in the NES game *Pinball* that same year, guest appearing as an unshaven umpire in *Tennis* (1984), and influencing the look of *Golf*'s (1984) moustachioed golfer Ossan, a character

MARIO MEMORIES

Eugene Jarvis
Arcade legend

My first recollection of Mario was in *Donkey Kong*. The character was ridiculous. Why am I a carpenter trying to rescue a princess from King Kong? *Super Mario Bros* is the greatest videogame of all time. It is etched in my brain like a phosphorescent cattle brand. Mario is the video star. He has been flogged and baked into the collective memory of humanity for 30 years. When the last cockroach is dead he will dance on the grave.

Jamie Woodhouse
Creator of Qwak!

I'm fairly sure my first experience of Mario was *Mario Bros* on the NES; I remember it not scrolling, just a static screen, with lots of turtles that go into pipes in the bottom corners of the screen, then coming out of pipes in the top corners. Characters were all simple, yet fun-looking, with a cutesy round feel to them. I think my all-time favourite *Mario* game is probably *Super Mario Land* on the Game Boy: simple, fun gameplay, not too complicated graphically, and of course, it was portable! I think maybe Mario's appeal is down to the personality of the character; I mean, he's not really a violent kind of dude, is he? And he's only there in the first place because he's trying to sort out the big bad boss or rescue his girlfriend – or was that the other game, the one with the big monkey? So I guess, maybe because he's not too violent, and he's there for a good reason, people maybe relate to that. Also, it can't hurt having the Nintendo marketing department on your side!

MARIO
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game. Capping the brothers' ability to jump, *Wrecking Crew* saw Mario and Luigi race around, smashing bricks and pillars in an advantageous order so as to clear each stage of everything destructible. It even came with a level designer. But while a neat concept, it fell into obscurity in the shadow of *Super Mario Bros*.

Sequel Sequel Panic

Now if there's one thing that Nintendo was seen to struggle with during the 8-bit era, it was sequels. While *Donkey Kong Jr* was an enjoyable enough successor, it really wasn't a patch on the tight, engaging and insanely addictive gameplay of *Donkey Kong*. And while *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link* had its good moments, to this day it's still deemed by many fans to be one of the weakest entries in the series. The *Super Mario Bros* series is no different and follows this peculiar pattern.

"Mario played a key role in resurrecting the American industry"

Owing to *Super Mario Bros*' success, Nintendo was understandably keen to capitalise on the game's popularity and so quickly pushed out an expert version exclusively for the Famicom Disk System to satiate demand. Released in 1986 as *Super Mario Bros 2* in Japan, it was a single-player game only, with players given the choice of picking between a 'Mario game' or 'Luigi game', and the brothers were given different attributes: Mario had better traction; Luigi a higher jump. On top of this, the difficulty level was also increased, and the game made more challenging through the inclusion of poisonous mushrooms and more aggressive enemies. But when the game came to ship to North America, NOA stressed its concerns that the game wasn't different enough to be deemed a true sequel and would be too challenging for Western gamers. Consequently, Nintendo was forced to do some pretty rapid troubleshooting, and this led it to re-skin another platform game by Miyamoto and his team titled *Yume Kojo: Doki Doki Panic*.

Released for the Famicom Disk System in Japan, *Doki Doki* garnered modest sales, likely owing to its Disk System exclusivity, and so Nintendo had the brainwave of switching the game's four Arabian heroes with Mario, Luigi, Toad and Princess Toadstool (Peach) and repackaging it as *Super Mario Bros 2* in the West. Without the aid of the internet back then, a very large proportion of the planet would be none the wiser of this cheeky game swap. Of course, we later got the chance to test our skills on the Japanese sequel when it was remade as *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels* for the 1993 *Super Mario All-Stars* compilation pack on the Super Nintendo.

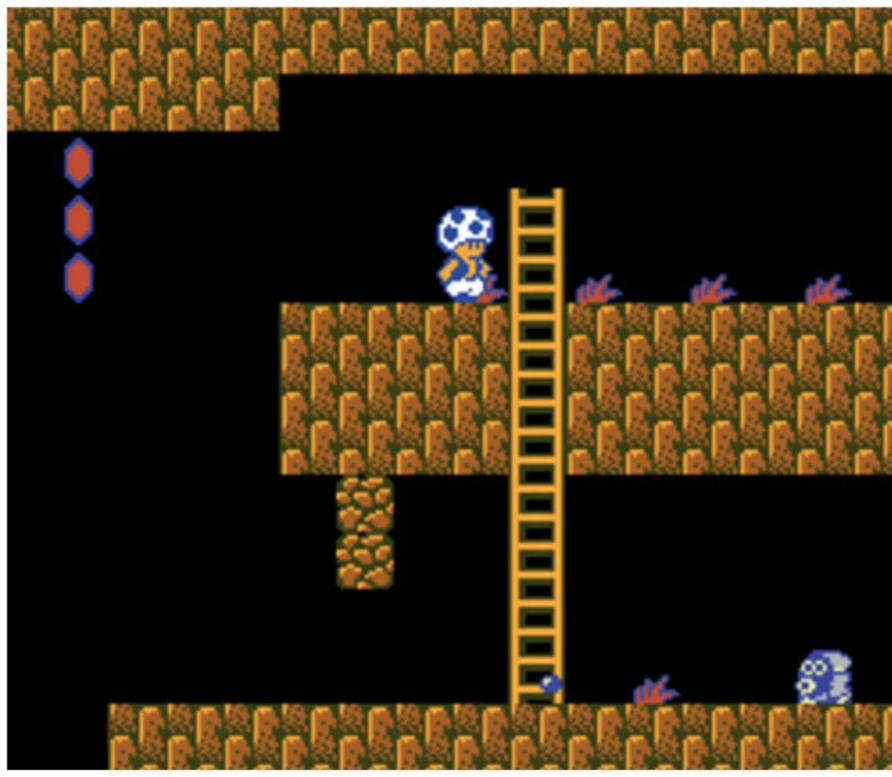
To tie everything together, *Doki*'s story was altered to explain away all the crazy Arabian leftovers – something about Mario entering a dream world called Subcon to defeat an evil frog overlord to free some enslaved fairy kids – and the game switch also explains why many of the enemies in the game never reappeared in subsequent *Mario* games, and Mario and pals' peculiar new attack method, which ditches head-stomping to see them instead pick up objects and enemies and toss them at other enemies.

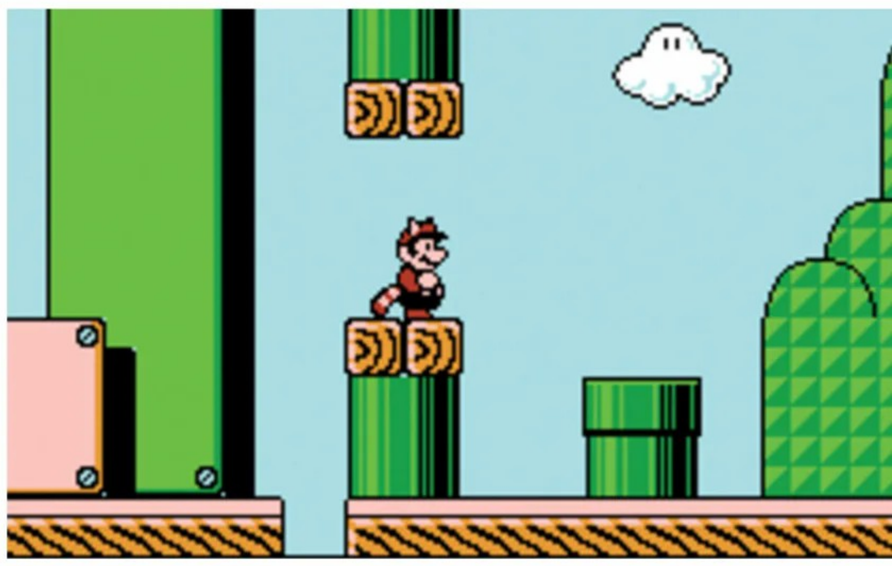
Released in the US in 1988, the re-skinned *Doki Doki* version of *Super Mario Bros 2* became a hot seller for the NES, becoming the third-bestselling game on the console, trading more copies than *The Legend Of Zelda*. And owing to its success, this version was later released in Japan in 1992 under the name *Super Mario USA*.

Hollywood Comes-A Knockin'

Towards the end of the Eighties, *Mario*-mania was starting to take effect, and its momentum was to be fuelled even further with the release of a game that many fans still consider to be the best game in the series. Taking two years to create, *Super Mario Bros 3* introduced more staples to the *Mario* series than any sequel before or since. It introduced elements such as an overworld map, complete with patrolling enemies that whisked the player to battle screens; enjoyable diversions by way of photo-fit mini-games; multiple routes through the game's eight massive worlds; new power-ups in the form of abstract costumes for the brothers; an inventory that allowed you to carry over items obtained in one stage into another, and more secrets than you could shake a Warp Whistle at.

To help create awareness and excitement for the release of the game in the US, *Super Mario Bros 3* was memorably first unveiled

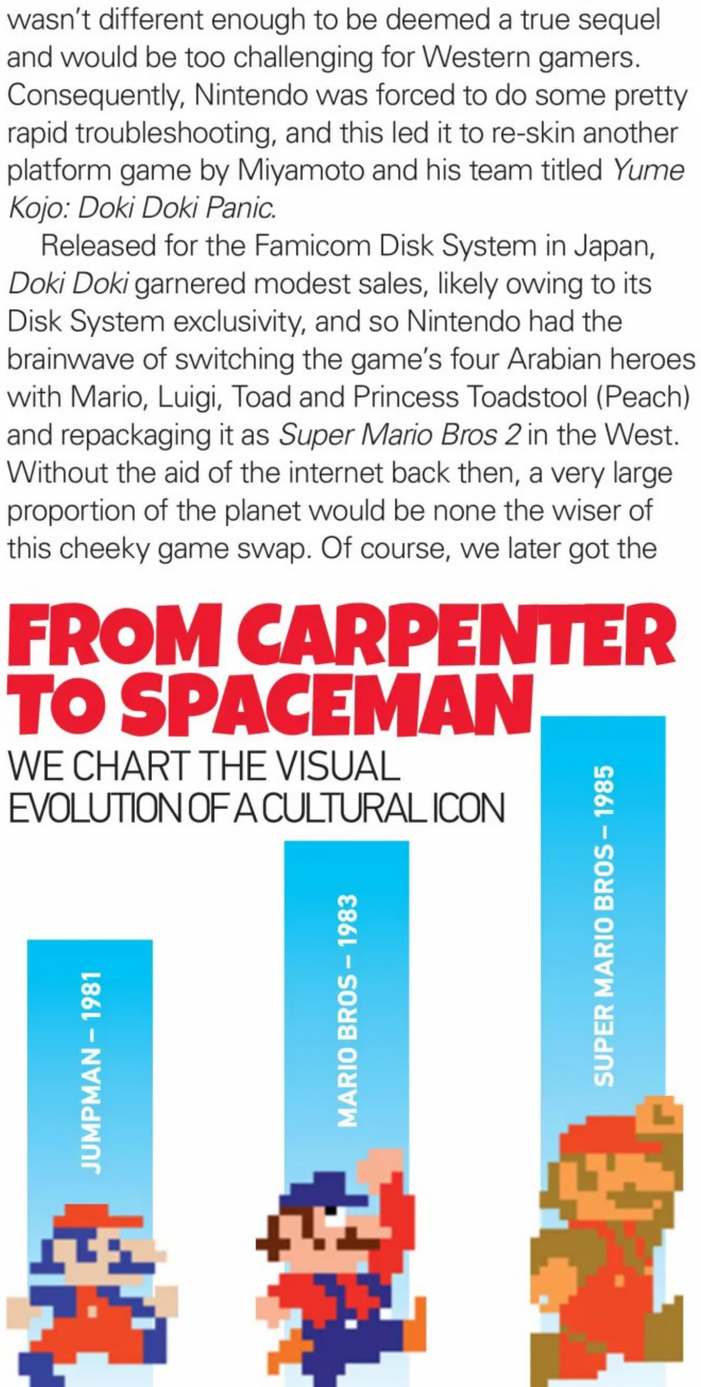




» If we had to pick the best game in the series, we'd have to hand it to *Super Mario Bros 3*. Way ahead of its time, it's *Mario* gaming at its very best.

From Carpenter To Spaceman

WE CHART THE VISUAL EVOLUTION OF A CULTURAL ICON


JUMPMAN – 1981
MARIO BROS – 1983
SUPER MARIO BROS – 1985
SUPER MARIO BROS 2 – 1988
SUPER MARIO BROS 3 – 1988
SUPER MARIO WORLD – 1990
SUPER MARIO 64 – 1996
SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE – 2002
SUPER MARIO GALAXY – 2007

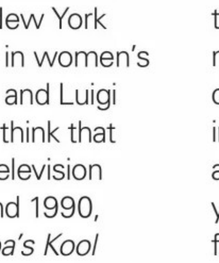
MR. VIDEOGAME

» The colourful *Super Mario World* stuck close to the *SMB3* template.

MARIO MEMORIES

Gary Bracey Software Manager Ocean Software

I spent quite some time in the early Eighties playing in the arcades, and so my first actual introduction to Mario was *Donkey Kong*. I recall he was the first 'human' character I had seen in games, as all others were cartoon or abstract like *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man*. My next major encounter was when Ocean obtained the rights to convert the first *Mario Bros* platform game, which was an okay game. However, when I discovered *Super Mario Bros* on the NES I was completely blown away and spent many, many weeks playing it to completion... and then playing it again! It's one of the few franchises that has never suffered from compromise. Nintendo recognises this and *Zelda* to be its bar-setting titles, and also its console-shifting games. If they released a sub-par version then not only would the whole perception of the franchise suffer, but it would probably impact sales of the hardware. As for the character itself, he is as synonymous with Nintendo as Mickey Mouse is to Disney, yet a lot more contemporary. Over the years they have managed to develop his personality to keep pace with the advances in console technology, so from the original few pixels there is now a 'fleshed out' character with personality and charisma. From my own perspective, Mario is a reason alone to purchase any new Nintendo console, and I can think of no greater compliment to pay.



Trip Hawkins Founder of Electronic Arts

Naturally my first time seeing Mario was *Donkey Kong* in an arcade in Silicon Valley, perhaps 30 years ago. Miyamoto-san is the best game designer in the history of the industry, and Mario's appeal is ubiquitous.

to Americans in the 1989 feature film *The Wizard*. Released into theatres a few months prior to the game's North American release, the movie's plot culminated in a Nintendo videogame tournament that ended with the finalists competing on a mysterious 'new game', which is revealed to be *Super Mario Bros 3*. Probably at the request of Nintendo, the game is hilariously unveiled in the film as if it were the single most brilliant objet d'art in the history of mankind. Although in hindsight we can let Nintendo off a little, as it actually comes pretty darn close.

But that wasn't all in the way of *Mario* marketing that year, as 1989 also spawned an animated/live action television show: *The Super Mario Bros Super Show!* The programme was an odd format that comprised a short ten-minute cartoon bookended by a peculiar live-action sitcom, in which Luigi was played by actor Danny Wells and Mario by former professional WWF wrestler Captain Lou Albano. Filmed in front of a probably perplexed studio audience, the show saw the pair conversing with drop-in celebrity guests from inside their *Bottom*-style dilapidated New York apartment, and in some episodes dress up in women's clothes to portray female versions of Mario and Luigi named Marianne and Luigeena. And if you think that sounds like a bizarre idea for a *Mario Bros* television show, during the holiday season of 1989 and 1990, Southern Californians witnessed *King Koopa's Kool Kartoons*, a live-action Krusty the Clown-type kids' telly show in which a guy dressed as Bowser presented cartoons to a room full of children, fondly referred to in the show as 'Koopa Troopas'.

1989 also marks the release of the Game Boy and saw Mario lose the pounds for his first proper portable adventure, *Super Mario Land*. A launch title for the Game Boy in Japan and North America, *Super Mario Land* was overseen by the *Donkey Kong* co-designer and *Metroid* and *Kid Icarus* producer, Gunpei Yokoi, and his solo involvement in the game resulted in a unique *Mario* title for the handheld. Putting his own stamp on the series, head-stomping Koopa Troopas now turned them into ticking time bombs, while striking some enemies in the game transformed them into a pile of decomposing bones. And elements of Yokoi's earlier work also found their way subtly into the game, such as a subterranean-style stage reminiscent of *Metroid* (Level 3-4) and the game ending with a side-scrolling shooter stage that saw Mario piloting a plane – a similar closing stage also occurred in *Kid Icarus*. Likely owing to Mario's popularity and the Game Boy's high installed base, *Super Mario Land* became a hugely successful *Mario* title, going on to sell more than 14 million units. It also spawned two sequels: *Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins*, notable for introducing Mario's doppelgänger Wario to the series, and *Wario Land: Super Mario Land 3*, in which the demented-looking villain took centre stage as a controllable character, in another first for the series.

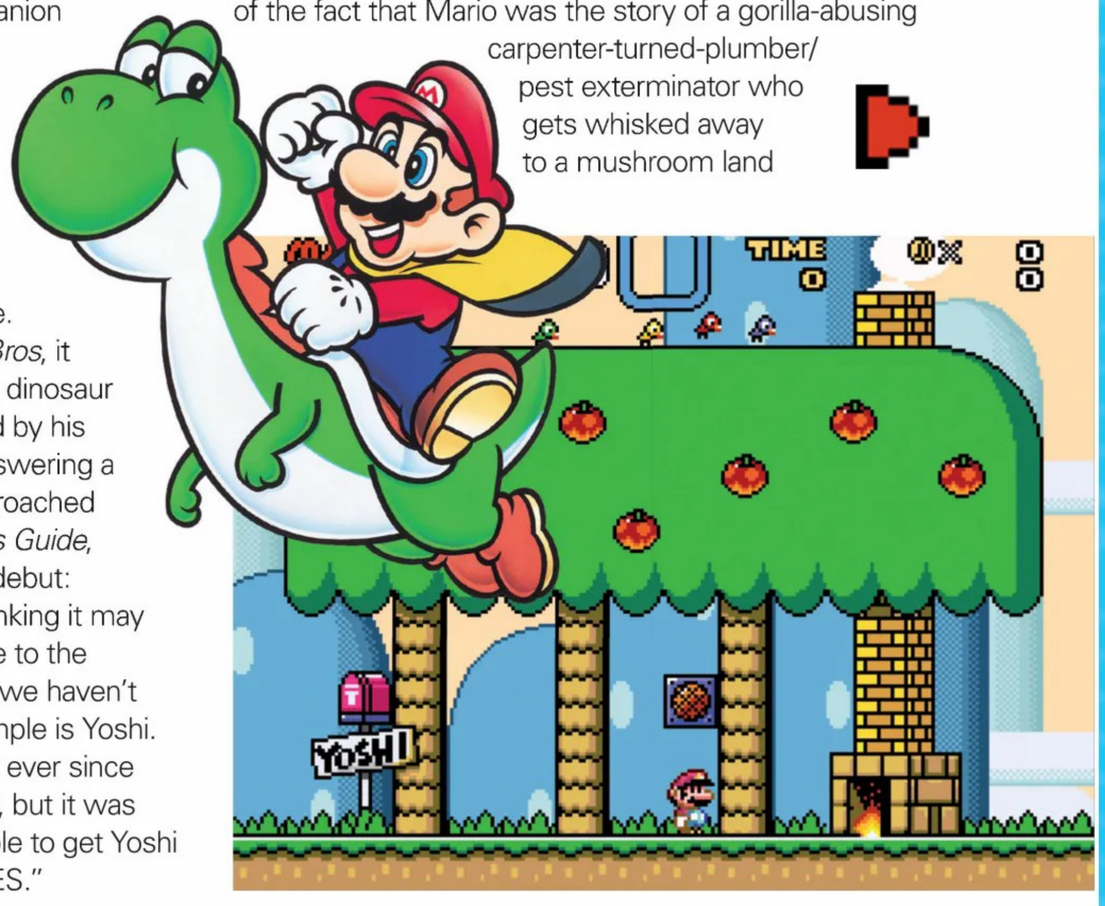
The arrival of the fourth generation of games consoles was an exciting time. Both the arcade and console markets were thriving, the NES had successfully brought gaming back home in North America, and Sega was officially first off the mark to make inroads into this new 16-bit era of gaming with the Mega Drive. With Mario now a global household name, gamers were eagerly anticipating the release of Nintendo's next instalment, especially as it was to be launched alongside its new-fangled 16-bit games console.

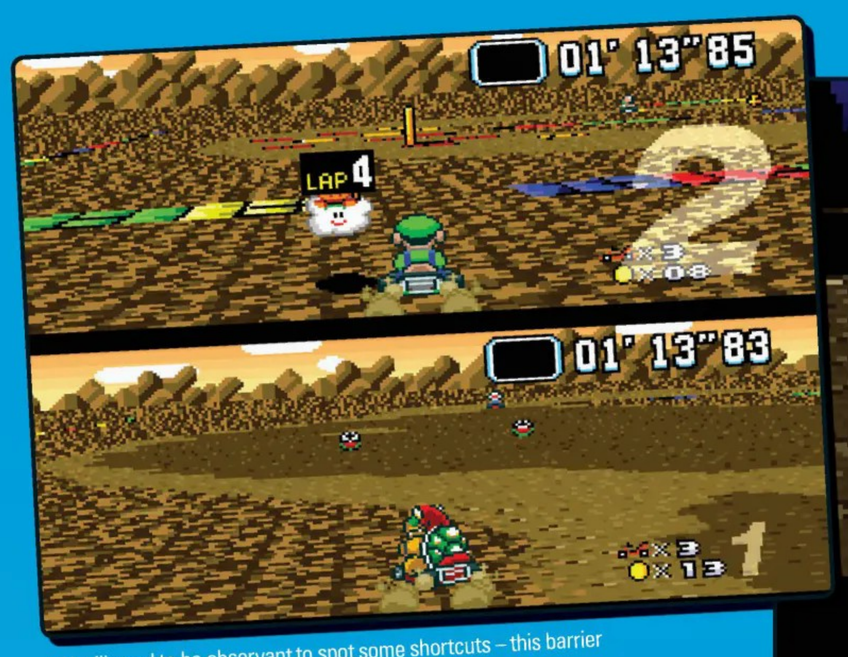
Released in 1990, *Super Mario World* stuck close to the *Super Mario Bros 3* template. Miyamoto and his team set about using the extra technical power of the Super Nintendo to create an enhanced, but not necessarily more innovative, version of the NES classic. Gone were the enjoyable mini-games and inventory, and Mario received a new makeover as well as an array of new power-ups, including a yellow cape that afforded him the power of temporary flight, and a lovable green dinosaur companion in the form of Yoshi – a character whose grabbing tongue was possibly inspired by Nintendo's popular Ultra Hand grabbing toy, and whose name could have derived as a portmanteau of Nintendo's then-president, Hiroshi Yamauchi. This is all pure **Retro Gamer** speculation, of course.

Following the release of *Super Mario Bros*, it was Miyamoto's intention to give Mario a dinosaur steed – an idea said to have been inspired by his motocross racing game, *Excitebike*. In answering a question about how he and his team approached *Mario* sequels in the *Mario Mania Player's Guide*, Miyamoto explained the delay in Yoshi's debut: "Once the game is released, we start thinking it may not be such a bad idea to add another title to the series. We usually have lots of ideas that we haven't been able to implement yet. A good example is Yoshi. We wanted to have Mario ride a dinosaur ever since we finished the original *Super Mario Bros*, but it was impossible technically. We were finally able to get Yoshi off the drawing boards with the Super NES."

Nintendo then followed up *Super Mario World* with *Super Mario Kart*. It became the bestselling racing game on the system, and Mario's most successful spin-off game series. Mario was now showing himself as a cultural icon, and the versatile face of Nintendo. In fact, his popularity had swelled so much that it was almost a given that the character would pique the interest of film studios wanting to cash in on his celebrity. And so Mario and Luigi did the inevitable, heading to the big screen for a live-action retelling of their videogame antics for the 1993 movie *Super Mario Bros*, plonking actors Bob Hoskins, John Leguizamo and Dennis Hopper in the roles of Mario, Luigi and Bowser, respectively. However, for all its promise and hype, the movie, which decides to throw out the colourful *Mario Bros* universe to plonk the brothers inside some kind of rubbish version of *Total Recall*, tanked at the box office and was branded an unmitigated big-budget failure, and Mario has never made a return to Tinseltown since.

Mario's next big Super Nintendo release came in the form of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*. In the game, Mario and Luigi were depicted as babies, with the player now fully assuming the role of a Yoshi and tasked with completing a colourful relay race to get Mario safely to his parents. Of course, given the infant ages of the brothers in the game, *SMW2* is deemed a prequel to the entire Mario series. Its story is thus pure retcon, as the game's ending shows the brothers delivered to their parents, who are seen living inside a house in the Mushroom Kingdom. That said, when you remember that before this point we were all accepting of the fact that Mario was the story of a gorilla-abusing carpenter-turned-plumber/pest exterminator who gets whisked away to a mushroom land





» You'll need to be observant to spot some shortcuts – this barrier gap is practically invisible from afar.

thematically in tune with the *Mario* setting – a feature that rival karting games with less well-developed settings would seek to imitate in the future, usually to less success.

The effect of adding items to the game was completely transformative. "Attacking and defending with the items in the game is probably the feature most associated with *Mario Kart*," say Konno and Sugiyama. Our memories of hundreds of Shell attacks and carelessly-hit Banana peels, along with the inevitable rage brought about by such incidents, prove that point perfectly. "Before this game was completed we went through thousands of tests to balance the items. It was really exciting during the test plays when we would win or lose thanks to the effects of the items," he adds with a laugh.

In fact, if you've ever had a strong reaction to *Mario Kart*, it's likely that the development team has shared it. "I really played the game a lot during the adjustment and debug phases of the development. Because of the strong competitive gameplay, once I started test playing I would get excited and start shouting out while I played," Konno elaborates. "I just couldn't help it because of the randomness and potential for making huge comebacks. It's frustrating to lose even if it's just part of debugging, so I would keep playing… I mean test playing over and over," he laughs. "I may have been a bit distracting for the development teams working on other projects."

That potential for huge comebacks wasn't added by chance, either. "I'm not very good at racing games so, to give me a chance to win, I adjusted the item chances so that you'd get more powerful items the further back in the pack you were," confirms

» Peach takes out Toad with a well-timed Red Shell, but he's got one of his own in stock…

» Getting hit won't just slow you down, it'll cause you to lose coins, lowering your top speed.

"Once I started test playing I would get excited and start shouting out while I played"

Hideki Konno

Sugiyama. "Because of this, even I could make more sudden-comeback victories, meaning I could play against even the skilled players." This proved to be a huge boost to the longevity of the game – multiplayer gameplay was made friendly to newcomers, as although there was a definite gap between the performance of the best and worst players, there was no guarantee that superior course knowledge and racing chops would result in victory every time. Everyone from your little brother to your grandma could play it and have a half-decent shot at victory.

Of course, if they didn't win races, there was also a Battle Mode to allow them to take out their frustrations on you.

"Battle Mode was an idea that came up while we were making the racing mode. It wasn't part of the original plan," say Konno and Sugiyama. "The competitive gameplay has strong shooter elements, and as we were experimenting with lots of different things, we found this fun to play, and better than we expected, so we decided to include it," explain the developers. "I wanted to create it as a game that works properly with two players. These players could then battle each other just like in *Mario Bros.*," adds Miyamoto, referring to the original 1983 arcade game.

Everything made sense in multiplayer, but the single-player experience exhibited a couple of oddities. The first was that even the single-player racing employs the same split-screen view of the action as

» Without being able to use 3D objects, Nintendo had to get creative with jumps to pull off crossover tracks.

the multiplayer mode. "The core of this game is the two-player multiplayer split-screen mode which we managed to achieve," explain Konno and Sugiyama. "We developed the game so that it could make use of a complete two-player competitive game system. The full map and rear-view mirror in the bottom half of the screen in single player were also extensions of that system. These features were achieved using camera angles and scaling adjustments. You could say it's the result of using the features efficiently."

The other oddity was in the use of items. While your racer would receive random items, CPU-controlled racers would only ever use their own fixed items, some of which were unavailable to players. "We ▶

KARTING KINGS

The Nintendo all-stars that we spoke to about Super Mario Kart

SHIGERU MIYAMOTO
PRODUCER,
SUPER MARIO KART

HIDEKI KONNO
DIRECTOR,
SUPER MARIO KART

TADASHI SUGIYAMA
DIRECTOR,
SUPER MARIO KART

MARIO KART

TEAM PICKS

Everyone's got a favourite track in Super Mario Kart – here are the ones we particularly like…

DARRAN

RAINBOW ROAD

■ This track felt like a loving homage to the racers I used to play in my local arcade. It's certainly not the easiest of tracks and I was never amazing at it, but the feeling you get when you complete the course without falling off is mighty sweet.

NICK

DONUT PLAINS 3

■ With a little bit of practice, this course will let you unleash your inner scumbag – which is exactly why I love it. Mastery of mushrooms will allow you to hop over the walls, making for huge sneaky shortcuts that will keep you ahead of the pack.

DREW

BOWSER'S CASTLE 2

■ I always felt a degree of trepidation when navigating Bowser's Castle. Maybe it was the Thwomps, and the fact that this was the course that me and my brother would always use in our furious head-to-heads. It's a true test of your karting mettle.

SAM

KOOPA BEACH 1

■ I was going to come boldly marching in with Battle Course 1 but unfortunately that parade was briskly cancelled due to rain – courtesy of Darran. I guess I'll go speeding through the shimmering, shallow waters of Koopa Beach while I throw a strop. Hmph.

▶ and courses, that product might have been considered good or even great. Once the decision was made to move away from straight racing, though, the team just kept going by adding more elements from the *Mario* platform games. For a start, collectable coins were placed on the course, which would speed up your kart. "This was an idea to add depth to the game. I remember that our boss, Mr Miyamoto, was rather focused on this," says Konno, and it's a point that Miyamoto confirms. "This is a feature that wouldn't be possible in a normal racing game. It seemed like it would be fun to actually place them on the course," he recalls. "I remember that we also made it so you could jump because this was a feature that couldn't be missing from a *Mario* game.

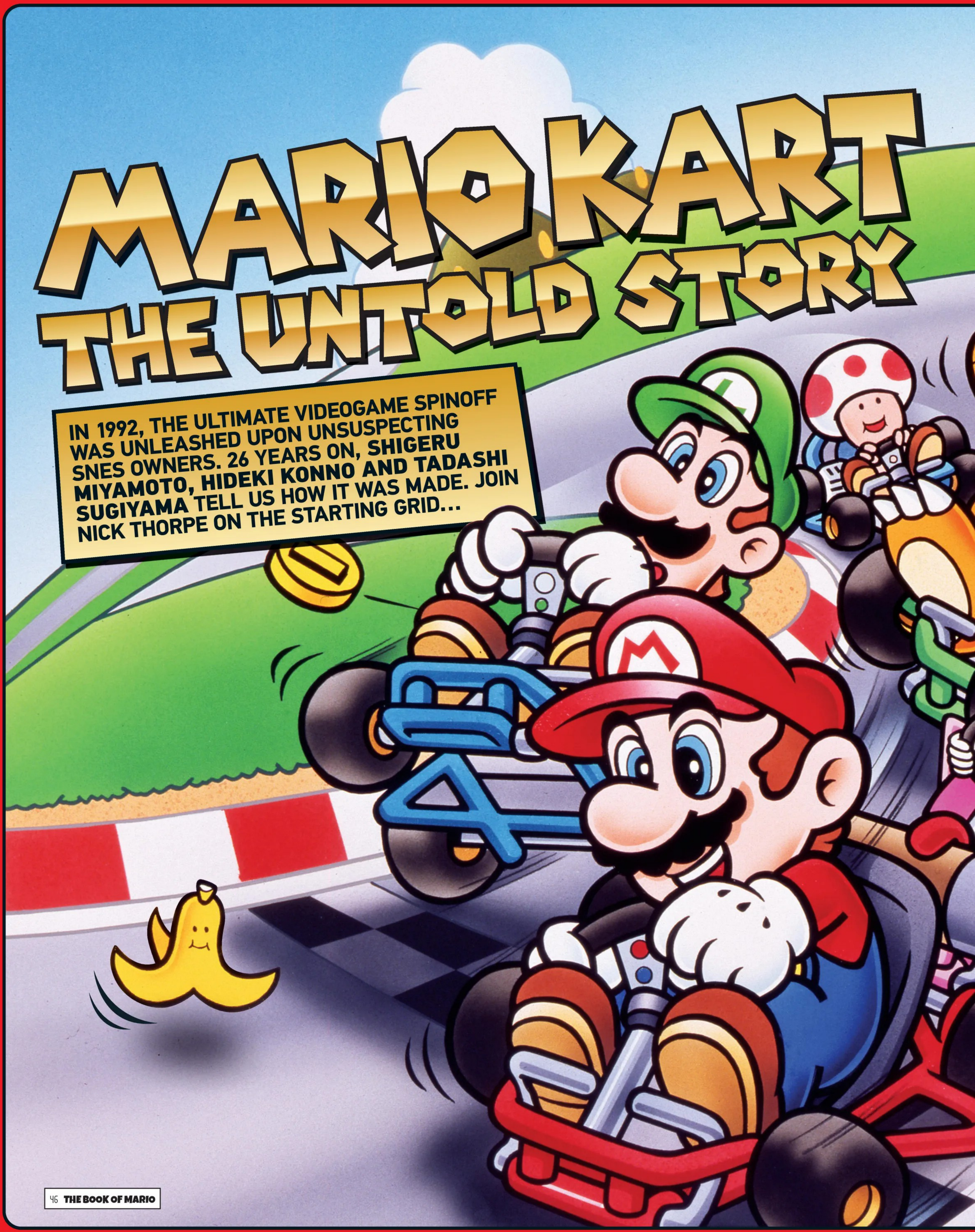
However, the game's defining feature would be the addition of power-up items, which could not only enhance your regular racing attributes such as speed, but also be used to attack other players. "When we decided that we would be making *Mario Kart* as a racing game, I thought that we shouldn't make a normal car-racing game, but instead create something based around the fun of competing for position, using karts as the medium," says Miyamoto. "It was a natural development that we would use items so that players who aren't as good could still have a chance to win, or that players who were behind could have something to give them a helping hand."

"The first item we made in the prototype was oil, which became the Banana," Konno and Sugiyama add. "We created items making sure they would fit with the *Mario* setting. In order to add offensive, defensive and unique elements to the gameplay while making sure these remained balanced, we added items with a *Mario*-esque design, such as Shells for attacking, Stars for invincibility and Ghosts for stealing other items, all while still prioritising the game processing." Nine items were created in total, each

» The map on the bottom half of the screen never lets you forget how close your opposition was…

MARIO KART
THE UNTOLD STORY

IN 1992, THE ULTIMATE VIDEOGAME SPINOFF WAS UNLEASHED UPON UNSUSPECTING SNES OWNERS. 26 YEARS ON, SHIGERU MIYAMOTO, HIDEKI KONNO AND TADASHI SUGIYAMA TELL US HOW IT WAS MADE. JOIN NICK THORPE ON THE STARTING GRID...



» Koopa throws caution to the wind and attempts the cross this precarious shortcut.

looked the same from behind and lacked individuality. It's hard to tell who is who, so we ran into another problem there."

The resolution to this problem proved surprisingly simple, and provided the game with some serious star power to rely upon. "We thought about what kind of character would be instantly recognisable when seen from behind, and decided to try Mario. Mario certainly is a recognisable character, even from behind, and it was instantly clear that it's him," explain Konno and Sugiyama. "For the other racers, we chose more characters from the *Mario* franchise who could also be clearly recognised from behind. This was the first step in the creation of *Super Mario Kart*. Without this hardware limitation we might have ended up with a different racing game."

» Racers can be squashed flat if they've been shrunk, just like poor Toad here.

Eight characters were chosen as racers. Mario and Luigi were obvious choices, as were Princess Peach, Toad and Yoshi. However, the appearance of the antagonistic characters Donkey Kong Jr., Koopa Trooper and Bowser in a friendly setting was a tad unexpected. We had to ask if there was ever a concern about that."Well the genre of the games are different and all the characters from the *Mario* series are essentially competing individually in the races, so I didn't find it strange, even if they are normally opponents," says Konno. "Here they are more like friendly rivals." Mario's character designer Shigeru Miyamoto, who served as producer on *Super Mario Kart*, elaborates on this: "The setting for *Mario* is in any case like a comic, where in each story the characters appear in different roles. Mario appearing in lots of different kinds of games is also in line with comic tradition. With this in mind, I had absolutely no objections with enemy characters racing against rivals or characters that you can control yourself." Sugiyama also chimes in on this point to add his take: "Also, despite being villains, as you say, it's still hard to actually hate these characters and I think it was a good point that users could happily use any of the characters."

With the characters established, the courses they were to race on had to be created within the tight space restrictions. "Due to the hardware limitations at the time, we couldn't place actual 3D objects," says Sugiyama. "So we divided the ground into different types: asphalt, dirt, wood, stone, and water and created differences between them by changing the values for their resistance." A great deal of variance was achieved using this approach – nobody would mistake Vanilla Lake's ice for the mud of Choco Island, for example. "For the backgrounds we picked things that fit with the *Mario* setting," he continues. "The course difficulties were adjusted as we played them, and things like the breakable barriers were added later to make the game more thrilling."

Had Nintendo been content to put out a simple two-player racing game featuring *Mario* characters ▶

BOWSER

SPECIAL ITEM: RIVAL:

ACCELERATION ★☆☆☆
TOP SPEED ★★★★
WEIGHT ★★★☆
HANDLING ★★☆☆

YOSHI

SPECIAL ITEM: RIVAL:

ACCELERATION ★★★★
TOP SPEED ★★☆☆
WEIGHT ★★☆☆
HANDLING ★☆☆☆

KOOPA TROOPER

SPECIAL ITEM: RIVAL:

ACCELERATION ★★★☆
TOP SPEED ★☆☆☆
WEIGHT ★☆☆☆
HANDLING ★★★☆

DONKEY KONG JR.

SPECIAL ITEM: RIVAL:

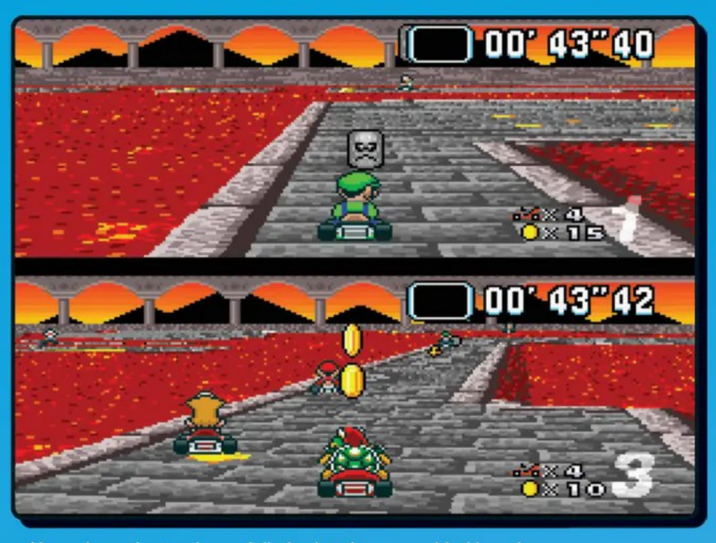
ACCELERATION ★☆☆☆
TOP SPEED ★★★★
WEIGHT ★★★☆
HANDLING ★★☆☆

MARIO KART

» The Super Famicom and SNES art were marginally different from each other.

Videogame spinoffs are a tricky thing to get right. Often, it seems like someone in marketing has asked the question, "Why don't we take [Property X] and make a [Genre Y] game out of it?" and then left the developers to solve the problem. Sometimes, the idea is sound but hampered by trying to adhere too closely to the original game's mechanics. On other occasions, the spirit of the original property is lost in the transition to a new genre, or the developer has wandered too far from what it does best and delivered a sub-par product. But the world's most beloved spinoff series didn't have any of these problems, because Nintendo EAD never started off with the goal of making *Super Mario Kart*.

"Our original plan didn't include Mario or karts. The game's roots lie in one of the launch titles for the SNES: *F-Zero*," director Hideki Konno and graphics artist Tadashi Sugiyama confirm to us. The futuristic racing game was a key technical showcase for the SNES, displaying the scaling and rotation capabilities of the console's custom graphics hardware – a feature commonly known as Mode 7. It was an influential and popular game, but one that lacked multiplayer. "The game was designed for single-player gameplay



» Hazards on the track aren't limited to those provided by other racers, as the Thwomp here proves.

> **"I had absolutely no objections with enemy characters racing against rivals"**
> Shigeru Miyamoto

because of our focus on getting across the sense of speed and the size of the courses," explain Konno and Sugiyama. "It was a prototype for a multiplayer version of *F-Zero* that ended up being the starting point for *Super Mario Kart*, and from there we went through a period of trial and error to find what worked."

"You could say that Mario was added to the racing game as a result of this trial and error," Konno and Sugiyama continue. "*F-Zero* displays the layer for the course over an area of 100 screens in order to create a feeling of speed and scale. However, because of hardware limitations, splitting the screen for multiplayer required the courses be displayed within an area no more than four TV screens wide by four screens high, i.e. 16 screens." Getting multiplayer working was possible, albeit with some sacrifice – and, as it turns out, losing a huge chunk of the map was a sacrifice too far. "We tried creating an *F-Zero*-style circuit within that limitation, but found it too difficult to race in with an F1-type vehicle, making it impossible to create a course that could give you a feeling of speed."

Given that high speeds were a key characteristic of *F-Zero*, it was clear that the game's theme needed to change. "In a last-ditch attempt, we came up with what we felt was our only choice: kart racing. Karts were a great fit for these compact courses," Konno and Sugiyama recall. The slower pace of the game certainly suited the smaller courses, although the development team would have to be inventive with their 1024x1024 pixel design space. "However, with the drivers wearing helmets and racing suits, they all

STARTING GRID

Your guide to the eight racers found in Super Mario Kart

MARIO

SPECIAL ITEM: RIVAL:

ACCELERATION ★★☆☆
TOP SPEED ★★★☆
WEIGHT ★★☆☆
HANDLING ★★☆☆

PEACH

SPECIAL ITEM: RIVAL:

ACCELERATION ★★★★
TOP SPEED ★★☆☆
WEIGHT ★★☆☆
HANDLING ★☆☆☆

LUIGI

SPECIAL ITEM: RIVAL:

ACCELERATION ★★☆☆
TOP SPEED ★★★☆
WEIGHT ★★☆☆
HANDLING ★★☆☆

TOAD

SPECIAL ITEM: RIVAL:

ACCELERATION ★★★☆
TOP SPEED ★☆☆☆
WEIGHT ★☆☆☆
HANDLING ★★★☆

Super Mario Bros 2

THE PLUMBER OF PERSIA

RETROREVIVAL

» NES » 1989 » NINTENDO

***Yume Kojo: Doki Doki Panic* is the Arabian original of the *Super Mario Bros* sequel.** After Nintendo released this standalone platform game in Japan, it was worried the game would prove just too taxing for us Westerners and we would grow to hate it for it. As a result, it came up with the brilliantly cheapskate idea of toning down the difficulty a shade, switching the characters for ones more commonly found milling around in Mushroom Kingdom, and calling it *Super Mario Bros 2*.

Now to the previously uninformed this will explain a lot. This explains the strange difference in gameplay, the somewhat stretched look of all the characters, the Egyptian feeling levels, the brothers' sudden inability to stomp-kill their enemies and all that peculiar vegetable pulling. But apart from dull box art – Mario holding a turnip – and it being built from the lovelorn ashes of another game, it's always puzzled me as to why so many Mario-fans look down their noses at it.

Super Mario Bros 2 marks the first and only time (not including *Super Smash Bros*) that Princess Peach isn't locked away in a castle, the first time Mario and Luigi actually work as a team – giving you the option to change between four characters between each stage – and the first time Nintendo would make Mario the fat one. It's also brilliantly playable too, feels more layered than the original, looks great and introduces many elements and enemies that would become mainstays for the series. There are the warp stalks, doorways, the backwards and vertical scrolling, and the gameplay itself which actually shares a lot of similarities with *Super Mario World*.

So it has to be said, the vitriol that's always been projected at it (I've always felt) was just a little unjust. It's no *Mario 3* beater but on the other hand it's no *Turbo Out Run* or *Final Fight 2* either. Sure, this is a different kind of adventure for Mario, but that doesn't make it a bad game. ✱

A FRIENDLY RIVALRY... EVENTUALLY

No feature on Mario would be complete without at least mentioning the epic 16-bit videogame war that Mario played a major part in. During the height of the 16-bit generation, school playgrounds around the globe were divided. One side bound together by a love for a dinosaur-riding Italian plumber named Mario; the other in support for a skittish, edgy and nippy blue hedgehog called Sonic. These two company mascots could scarcely be more different, but together their rivalry spearheaded one of the most exciting periods in gaming ever. With each console generation that passed their competition softened, until Sega eventually bailed out of the hardware market altogether in 2001. What happened next, no school kid back in 1993 could ever have predicted: Sega started releasing *Sonic* games on Nintendo consoles, starting with *Sonic Adventure 2 Battle* on Nintendo's GameCube. And then two videogame mascots got to finally settle their differences publicly when they appeared together in the game *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* in 2007, followed by the long-awaited chance to beat the crap out of each other in 2008's *Super Smash Bros Brawl*.

MARIO MEMORIES

Martyn Brown Team 17 Founder

Obviously, like many people, I first saw Mario in *Donkey Kong*, but he really played second fiddle to DK. It's amazing to think that Nintendo took the Mario character and threw him into the *Super Mario* world, as it was an anonymous character before then. I wasn't super sure what to make of the first true *Mario* game in terms of character, other than it being brilliantly playable – I was too busy with the Amiga around that time anyway. I think my favourite *Mario* game has been *Super Mario 64*, the first 3D offering, because it was so incredibly well-considered for its time. I've enjoyed the past games, but they get a bit too hardcore for me. Mario's remained so enduring because he's so charming and a lot of fun. The games are generally so well-balanced to play that it's difficult to get too frustrated and therefore swear at him, although I'm sure it's been done a few times – even by me.

David Braben Co-Creator of Elite

I think my first experience of Mario was in a pub, in the original *Donkey Kong*. To be honest I didn't particularly register the character, more the way the game was played, which seemed a little bizarre at the time! *Mario 64* on the Nintendo 64 was the first Mario game I really enjoyed playing, as it was, for me at least, less annoying than the previous outings. Later games are great too, but *Mario 64* sticks in my mind the strongest, as for its time it was a great trailblazer. Interestingly, in the days of *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros* the character image was pretty indistinct and heavily pixelated. Later games featured him as an image, and I think that is when he started to be identified, but *Mario 64* was the first game, I think, that really made a character out of him, for example when he spoke on the title screen of the game. If anything, especially in the USA, I think he has become the icon of Nintendo. Other factors – like the fact that he seems to run like a toddler does – makes him pretty endearing. He is a pretty non-threatening character.

» Mario's back on top form following two superb Wii titles that are literally out of this world.

through a giant pipe and must then rescue their princess from a giant turtle king, we guess such changes can be forgiven.

Released in 1996, Mario's final Super Nintendo outing saw him throw his cap into another new genre, this time the RPG with the Square-developed *Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars*. The game was a mixture of isometric platform RPG and turn-based battles, and the game's visuals utilised the snazzy ACM graphics techniques seen in *Donkey Kong Country*. But coming late in the Super Nintendo's life, and only released in the US and Japan, it was largely missed by many on its release.

MARIO REACHES 64

Another new console saw another groundbreaking entry in the *Mario* series come, this time in the form of *Super Mario 64* for the N64. Always innovating, Nintendo once again sought to revolutionise the platform genre, and in doing so proved undoubtedly that the creative, fun, engaging and abundant gameplay of previous *Mario* adventures could adapt to a true 3D polygon world unscathed. The N64's analogue controls also worked overtime to further enhance the experience. With a wealth of new acrobatic moves at Mario's disposal, *Mario 64* turned him from portly jumpy plumber into a gaming Baryshnikov. Finally, through a series of open-ended levels – all connected by a castle-shaped hub – that unfurled with each revisit, it offered players the chance to really immerse themselves in the colourful and enchanting world of the Mushroom Kingdom. It was truly the gaming equivalent of chasing the rabbit down to Wonderland, and with the inclusion of Mips the rabbit in the game, who spouted dialogue very similar to Lewis Carroll's tardy White Rabbit, this notion was clearly not lost on Miyamoto and his EAD team.

Following the release of *Mario 64*, Mario himself then broke into even more game genres with the first entry in the Hudson-developed *Mario Party* series. And the N64 era also saw Mario return to his NES sporting roots in *Mario Golf* and *Mario Tennis*, before appearing in the first *Super Smash Bros* and making his final 'so long' for the console with *Paper Mario*.

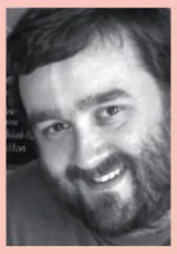
Owing to the early release of *Mario 64* on the N64, it comes as a surprise to many that a sequel was never released on the system. Well, in actual fact, for a time a *Mario 64* sequel was in development, albeit for the 64DD. In 1997 Miyamoto revealed to E3 attendees that work had started on the game. However, following the disastrous launch of the add-on in Japan, and its subsequent poor domestic sales, Nintendo promptly stopped support for the hardware and the game was scrapped.

During Nintendo's Space World event in 2000, the company showcased the power of its brand new console, the GameCube, with a *Mario* tech demo dubbed *Super Mario 128*. The short demonstration showed a large 2D Mario splintering into 128 smaller versions that ran across the surface of a globe. It showcased, for the first time, the 'sphere-walking' tech that was to be later utilised for *Super Mario Galaxy*.

The following year, however, and at the same show, *Super Mario Sunshine* was unveiled to the crowds, and while it shared little likeness to *Super Mario 128*, it was formally announced as the official sequel to *Mario 64*. Apart from a story that saw Mario partaking in a spot of community service after the squeaky plumber is forced to clean up the mess left by a muck-spraying imposter, *Sunshine* stuck very close to *Mario 64*'s template.

Set in the sun-drenched Isle Delfino, *Sunshine* kept the popular hub structure of *Mario 64*, and progression still relied on the collection of Stars – now named Shine Sprites. As well as the 3D return of Yoshi, the most novel feature in *Sunshine* came in the form of an odd rucksack armament called FLUDD (Flash Liquidizing Ultra Dousing Device) that Mario could use not only as a cleaning weapon but also as a way to help get around the stages. Clever aiming of the FLUDD's spray nozzles

MARIO MEMORIES



Ste Pickford
Legendary 8-bit coder

Definitely *Donkey Kong* in Stockport Arcade, or maybe on holiday in Blackpool or Southport. Of course I never knew that was Mario at the time. I could never get past the second screen, but must have spent dozens of 10ps trying. The first real introduction to Mario was at Rare. We had a meeting there in about 1988, and they showed us *Super Mario Bros* on a NES. We must have just screwed our faces up because of how ugly it looked. We were heavily into developing Amiga and Atari ST games at the time, and had sort of graduated from blocky four-colour graphics to higher-res 16-colour graphics with large, non-repeating bitmaps. The Stampers told us to ignore the fact that it didn't look that good, and insisted that we play it because it was better than any Amiga game. We laughed, but I think they lent us a NES with a couple of games, and sure enough, *Super Mario Bros* was brilliant. The irony is that the simple, functional graphics of *SMB* have dated much better than the over-worked Amiga graphics of the same period. Without a doubt my favourite Mario game is *Super Mario Bros 3*. We were developing NES games ourselves when it was released, and we were just blown away by how much better this game was than anything we were working on. It was at that point that I first appreciated what a great designer Mr Miyamoto was, and what a great developer Nintendo is. They were streets ahead of everyone else in the world at that time. That game introduced so many new ideas, and had so much imagination – every new level was surprising and delightful. I don't think that level of consistent invention in one game has been matched by any game since, until *Super Mario Galaxy*, but *Super Mario Bros 3* wins for me because of the big impression it made on me when I was younger.

» A landmark game for Mario, which set an unreachable benchmark for future 3D games to try to meet.

MARIO MEMORIES

Greg Omi
Atari Lynx progammer

I first saw Mario in *Donkey Kong*, but the first time I really recognised Mario was in *Super Mario Bros* for the Nintendo. I was working at Epyx at the time and the testers were playing it. That year I bought NES consoles for all of my nieces and nephews.

Mario Kart 64 is probably my favourite *Mario* game because it led us to make *Crash Team Racing*, which I consider to be the most fun game I've ever worked on. I loved the slide mechanics and the random power-ups to rubber band the gameplay, helping out the players in the back. Really good level design also. I love Wario Stadium with the unintentional short cut at the beginning of the track where you could jump over the wall twice to get a really low lap time.

Right place right time and branding. Mario came to represent Nintendo as a mascot because of the success of *Super Mario Bros*. This led Nintendo to market based on Mario, which increased his popularity. Popularity is a power function, so once you have brand recognition, you have inertia to give you a leg up on the competition. That's why everyone makes sequels, why movie companies try to make blockbuster movies, and why indies and original material have a hard time breaking through. Just look at social gaming: *FarmVille*, which I now work on, is twice as popular as the next most popular game; there are a bunch of games around second place, followed by the 'long tail' of games after that. There can only be one super popular game at a time, and at some point *FarmVille*'s popularity will fade and another game will rise to fill its spot. *World Of Warcraft* is another example of this.

could launch Mario up into the air and even afford him a handy spray-powered speed boost. However, the device quickly became a bone of contention with many fans when they soon discovered that it hindered the responsive control of Mario, and made retrieving stars almost feel like Mario-endorsed GCSE physics exercises.

With *Mario Sunshine* failing to capture or stir up the same level of popularity as previous big-budget *Mario* titles, and it becoming increasing likely that the GameCube would become Nintendo's most unsuccessful console to date, outwardly it seemed that the once-infallible videogame giant was finally losing its grip on the market it formerly dominated, and Mario seemed to echo this sense of dispassion, appearing in a series of decent but uninspired sports sequels – *Mario Power Tennis*, *Mario Superstar Baseball* and *Mario Golf Toadstool Tour* – following a good but equally uninspired *Mario Kart* sequel with *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*. But just as it seemed Nintendo was becoming crestfallen by its fall from greatness, the Wii happened and changed its fortunes in a way that nobody could have predicted.

» *Super Mario Sunshine* marked the first playable 3D appearance of Yoshi, as well as the first and, hopefully, last appearance of FLUDD.

SPACE: THE FINEST FRONTIER

Both *Mario Galaxy* and *Mario Galaxy 2* stand as nigh-on flawless examples of expert game design, and rank among the best games in the *Mario* series. By making inspired and sensible use of the Wii's motion-sensor controls, Nintendo was able to recapture the keen sense of fun, exploration and enjoyment that dazzled gamers in *Mario 64*. Making use of the sphere-walking technology first demoed in *Super Mario 128*, Miyamoto and his team shot for the stars by opting to set the games in outer space, with levels taking the form of galaxies, all filled with individual planets and worlds to explore. Like *Mario 64* before it, the controls were also wonderfully implemented. Players could steer Mario in comfortable *Mario 64* fashion, but also aid him using the Wii Remote, which, through an on-screen reticule, could be used to suck up 'Star Bits' and launch Mario between planets. The *Galaxy* games also saw a return of the costume-style power-ups of old, including a bee costume that gave Mario the power of temporary flight, a spring suit to heighten his jump, and the first 3D iteration of the Fire Flower.

"THIS INDUSTRY WOULD BE A FAR GLUMMER PLACE WITHOUT MARIO"

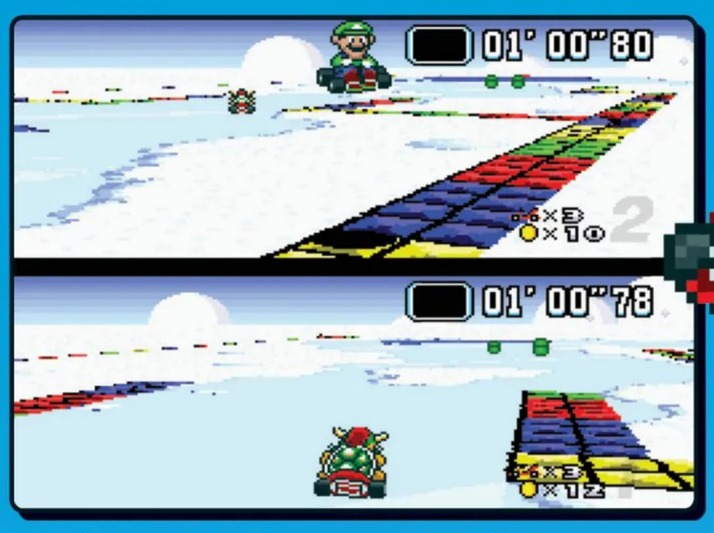
Complementing these two interstellar *Mario* adventures was another *Paper Mario* game, one of the best *Mario Kart* sequels to date in *Mario Kart Wii*, and a real return to the character's Famicom roots in the four-player platformer *New Super Mario Bros*, a game that brought simultaneous multiplayer back to the series for the first time since the original *Mario Bros*. And Nintendo's love for the past looks set to continue. Nintendo released a special *Super Mario Special Collection* for the Wii to celebrate the 25th anniversary, as well as *New Super Mario Bros* on DS.

Mario's adventures continued on Nintendo's next hardware releases with *New Super Mario Bros 2* and *Super Mario 3D Land* for Nintendo 3DS and the rather excellent *Super Mario 3D World* on Wii U. The Wii U got another surprise in the form of the brilliant *Super Mario Maker*, which allowed players to create their own Mario-themed levels and share them online. It was later released on 3DS. The eigth *Mario Kart* also made its debut on Wii U and introduced *F-Zero*-styled anti-gravity sections. So popular was it, Nintendo repackaged it for the Switch and included all its fantastic DLC tracks. Which brings us to *Super Mario Odyssey*, the latest critically acclaimed game. It appears Mario isn't going anywhere.

Super Mario Kart wasn't just critically and commercially popular, it was influential. The kart racing formula has been copied and cloned a hundred times over by all manner of competitors, from originals like *Speed Freak* to crossovers like *Konami Krazy Racers*, as well as mascot-centric games starring Pac-Man, Bomberman, Crash Bandicoot and inevitably Sonic. However, very few have ever come close to the heights of the *Mario Kart* series – it's hard to replicate the appeal of the Mushroom Kingdom, the precise balance of items that keeps each race open, and the refined handling model that underpins *Mario Kart*.

It can certainly be argued that the Mario Kart series is just as beloved as the overall franchise that spawned it. What's more, it's perhaps even more valuable to Nintendo from a financial perspective. The games sell in huge numbers, and in recent years these have even eclipsed those of the acclaimed platform games – *Mario Kart Wii* sold 36.83 million copies, almost three times as many as *Super Mario Galaxy* (no slouch, at 12.72 million), and *Mario Kart 8* was the bestselling Wii U game, beating the second-placed *New Super Mario Bros U* by over 2.5 million copies.

With all that in mind, it's no exaggeration to say that *Super Mario Kart* is the most important spinoff game of all time, and nothing else even comes close. How does this feel for the developers? "I'm extremely happy, and deeply grateful that *Mario Kart* has become the series it is today, and has continued to be loved by users for so long," says Sugiyama. "I think it's thanks to the efforts of the staff, who for each new instalment work to implement new ideas and make each game feel fresh so users don't get tired of them. I hope you'll continue to look forward to new *Mario Kart* games."

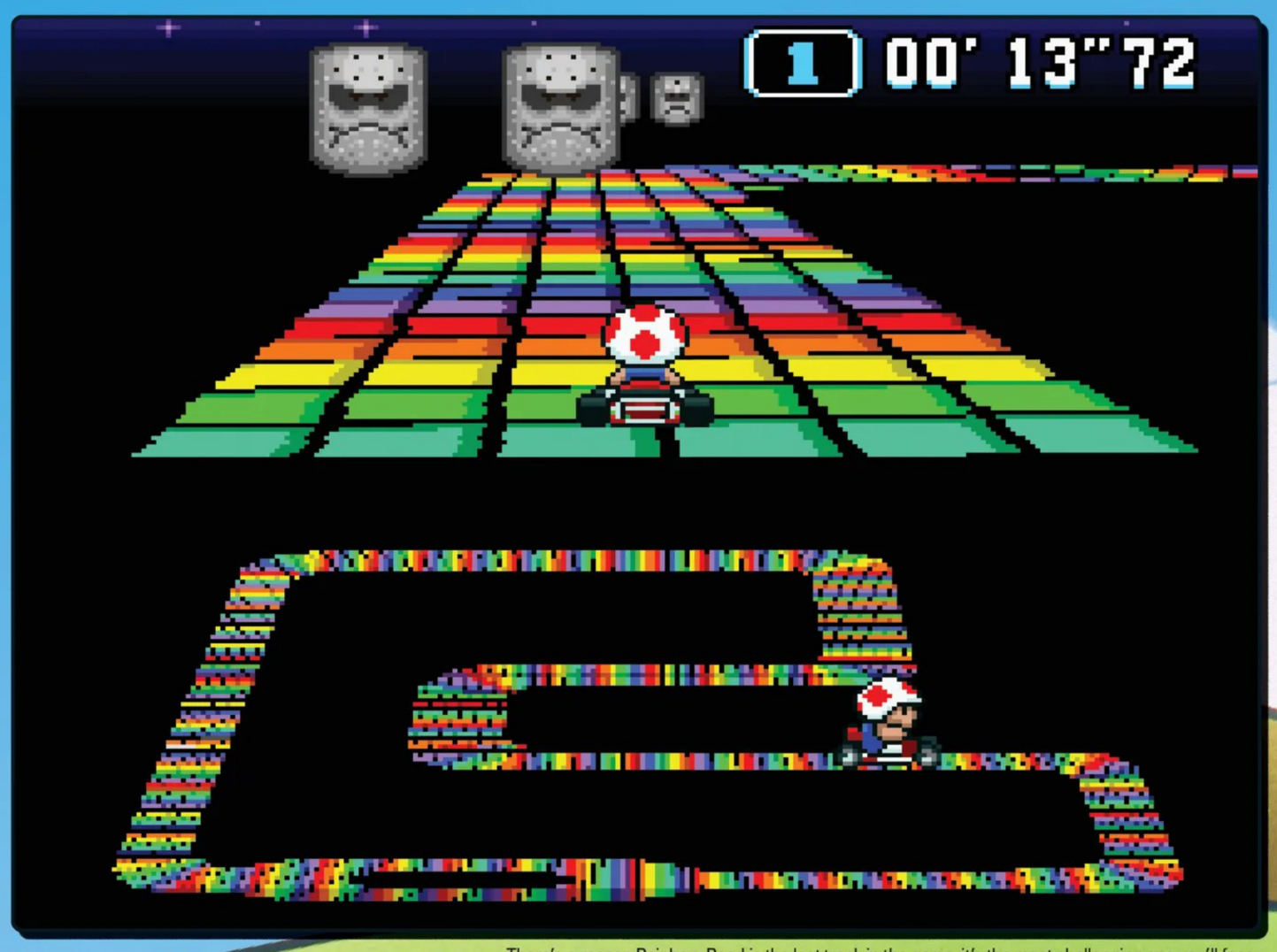


» All sorts of corner-cutting shenanigans are possible with use of the feather.

"I'm extremely happy and proud that so many people have enjoyed the game and continue to play it for so long," says Konno. "*Mario Kart* became a series of its own, where you can glide through the sky or race underwater, and in the latest instalment you can even control gravity! I'm sure more unique experiences will keep being introduced to the *Mario Kart* series so users can continue playing for years to come."

We have no doubt that players will keep coming back – they've embraced *Mario Kart* as an evergreen series. It has managed to transcend the changing fashions of the last 26 years, not to mention the varying fortunes of Nintendo's consoles, because stealing first place with a red shell feels bloody brilliant. That simple truth means that *Super Mario Kart* and its successors will always have an audience. ✱

Special thanks to our interviewees for answering our questions, and to Kalpesh Tailor and Emma Bunce for making this article possible.



» There's a reason Rainbow Road is the last track in the game, it's the most challenging one you'll face.

BATTLING BACK

How Super Mario Kart is influencing Mario Kart 8 Deluxe on Switch

» The DNA from the original *Super Mario Kart* is still clear in the franchise's most recent outing.

Sometimes, you don't know what you have until it's gone – and that's certainly true for many elements of the original *Super Mario Kart*, which have come and gone over the years. Character-specific items and collectable coins were both omitted from *Mario Kart 64* but later returned to the series, and *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe* is bringing back more SNES-era features that have been missing as of late.

With the original Wii U version of *Mario Kart 8*, the biggest complaint that many had was the omission of the classic Battle Mode, a feature which originated on the SNES. Instead of being able to roam around specially-designed arenas that encouraged carnage and interaction, the game featured battles on regular racing tracks, a compromise which satisfied few. The good news is that SNES-style battling is back in *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe*, and a variety of retro arenas are making their return along with it, including the SNES Battle Course 1.

That's not the only returning feature, either. While Bandai Namco's arcade games have featured the Boo as an item consistently, Nintendo's *Mario Kart* games haven't done so since *Mario Kart DS*, but it's back for *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe*. Also returning is the feather, not seen since *Super Mario Kart*. This battle mode exclusive item doesn't just allow you to jump over enemy shells and banana skins – at close range it'll also let you steal another racer's balloons!

MARIO KART

HIT STOP

Mario Kart, and kart racers in general, just wouldn't be the same without the ability to attack your fellow racers or close the gap with a boost. We take a look at the items that were on offer in 1992...

MUSHROOM

■ This item gives you a brief burst of speed, and is commonly handed out to racers that are falling behind the pack. Use it to cover rough terrain for a handy shortcut!

STAR

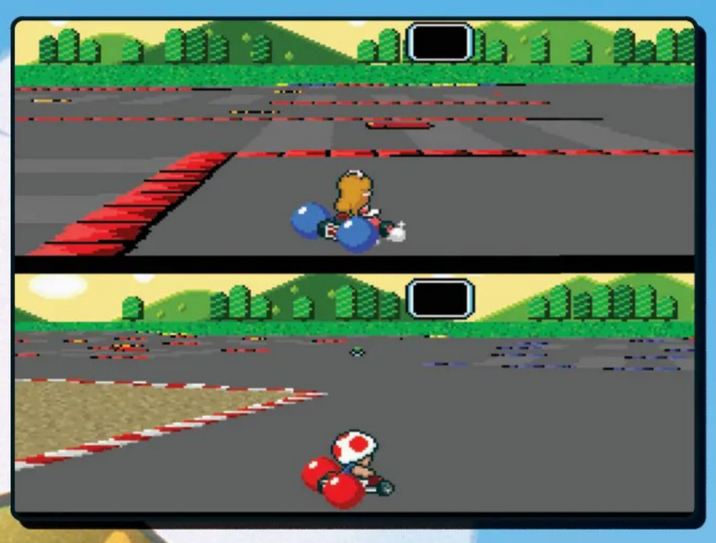
■ If you're struggling to keep up, you may receive this rare item. It both temporarily boosts your speed and enables you to attack other racers by ramming them.

FEATHER

■ Using the feather will allow for a super high jump that creates major shortcut opportunities. These are most commonly found in the Ghost Valley circuits.

BANANA PEEL

■ This defensive item is commonly dished out to the frontrunners, and can be thrown forwards or backwards. If another racer hits it, they'll spin out immediately!



▶ wanted to give each character some personality. By giving the CPU racers some individuality it adds something special to the single-player mode, expanding the gameplay and making it more fun," explains Konno. "At the same time, with the hardware limitations and technical abilities of the time, it was difficult to implement the kind of logic that would allow CPU racers to use items well," he continues. "So we racked our brains about how we could make the game fun, and this was the result. In later titles we made it so that the CPU racers could also use the normal items properly throughout the game."

When Super Mario Kart was finished in 1992, the development team was pleased with having come up with a creative solution to a hard technical limitation. "Looking from the perspective of how to create *F-Zero*-style gameplay within such a small area, it seemed a huge challenge from both a planning and technical sense," says Konno. "We were able to overcome the technical problem by using karts. Instead of thinking conservatively and continuing to struggle with the problems, we came to a positive outcome by dramatically changing the gameplay." Despite this, the team had no idea of the success that it would go on to achieve. "We were also playing the game as we were making it, so I knew it was fun, but I didn't imagine that users would actually like it that much," says Sugiyama.

> **"We were also playing the game as we were making it, so I knew it was fun"**
> Tadashi Sugiyama

Like it they did, though – in a 92% review in *Nintendo Magazine System*, Jaz Rignall noted the two-player racer as "fast, furious and highly addictive racing action – the best yet seen on the SNES". *N-Force* awarded it 88%, with Nick Roberts noting that "with a few mates the game bursts into life", while *Super Play* offered 94%, calling battle mode "simply the best two-player game ever". In America, reviewers were similarly taken with the game. *GamePro* offered it a full 5/5 Fun Factor rating, while the four reviewers from *Electronic Gaming Monthly* offered it two 9/10 and two 8/10 scores, calling it "the best driving game to come along for some time".

Players took notice of this praise and picked up the game in their droves, with more players catching onto the game through playing with friends. The game eventually sold a massive 8.76 million copies, placing it behind only *Super Mario World* and *Donkey Kong Country* as the third-highest-selling SNES game as all time, comfortably ahead of the fourth-placed *Street Fighter II* by over 2 million copies. Despite being so common, demand for *Super Mario Kart* is still very high today amongst SNES collectors – you'll be lucky to find a loose PAL cartridge on eBay for less than £20, and boxed copies naturally sell for more.

When asked why he thinks *Super Mario Kart* was so successful, Konno is quick to point to the multiplayer appeal of the game. "I think maybe lots of people played it as a kind of 'competitive communication

SUPER MARIO LAND

» Look at the use of space. The clean lines. The almost mathematical precision of placement. Extraordinary.

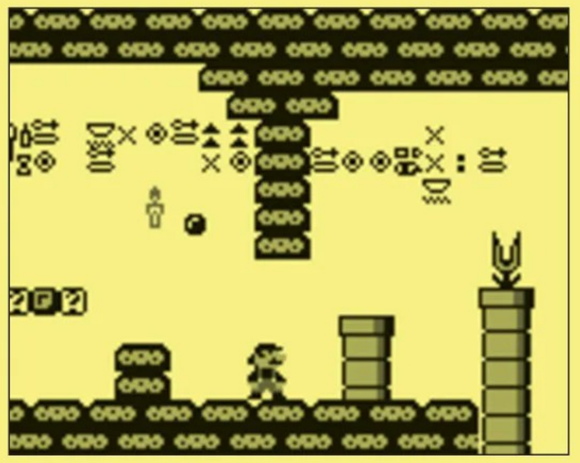
One of the monochrome Game Boy's earliest releases, Super Mario Land displayed a clever understanding of the hardware's inherent abilities. It contained bold and ingenious design decisions which were promptly ignored by nearly all future GB developers. Despite being a Classic Game, why didn't more follow its example?

The Game Boy is a curious system. Nearly everyone owned one, but when you look, and we mean really look at the release list, there are strangely few titles which scream out as being all-time classics. Far too many poor licences, a lot of generic rubbish, and countless games which, despite being mind-numbingly astounding, few have even heard of let alone actually had the fortune of playing – have you ever heard of *Cat Trap* or *Mr. Chin's Gourmet Paradise*? Several games haven't even been dumped.

This leaves only a select few titles worthy of two-page Classic Game coverage: *Tetris*, *Gargoyles Quest*, *Pokémon*, *Link's Awakening*, *Alien 3*, and of course *Super Mario Land*. Notice how most were either released early in the system's life or, in the case of *Pokémon*, began development very early on before getting a late release. Why were so many of the greatest GB games, like *Super Mario Land* (a launch title), mainly forged in those early experimental years? The general reason is one of scope, with later releases being overly ambitious, trying to replicate NES and later even SNES-style visuals, nearly always resulting in a turgid mess (what had RARE been thinking when releasing guff like Game Boy *Killer Instinct*?).

Super Mario Land's magnificence as a GB game results from its minimalist purity. Look at everything's diminutive pixel stature, stripped back to the bare essentials yet still recognisable. The minute details are exquisite in the extreme, evoking the same feelings as seeing delicate Japanese embroidery, nouveau cuisine, or a puppy whose body is too small to support a deformedly large head. By not attempting to shoehorn enormous sprites onto the system's limited 160 by 144 pixel screen, it meant all potential dangers could be seen in advance and there was no need to jump blindly hoping for a platform to appear; there was no blurring or confusion when viewing the screen, which is arguably the most important thing in handheld games.

Visually everything is functional, with an abstract symbolism for key elements. There is the standard Power Mushroom which increases size, but due to the



» The Egyptian themed levels even have hieroglyphs in the background. How's that for realism?

IN THE KNOW

» **VERSION FEATURED:** NINTENDO
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

"THE MINUTE DETAILS ARE EXQUISITE IN THE EXTREME, EVOKING THE SAME FEELINGS AS SEEING DELICATE JAPANESE EMBROIDERY OR NOUVEAU CUISINE"

MARIO KART

TIMELINE ATTACK

Here's how the legacy of Super Mario Kart unfolded over the 25 years since its launch...

MARIO KART 64

N64, 1996

■ The first sequel to *Super Mario Kart* used the N64's power to move the series into full 3D, allowing for more dynamic course designs. It also bumped the player count from two to four and introduced the dreaded Blue Shell.

MARIO KART SUPER CIRCUIT

GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2001

■ Like the SNES original, the first handheld *Mario Kart* used Mode-7-style flat, rotating tracks. It also included the SNES courses as unlockable extras, combining with the game's 20 brand-new tracks for a mammoth roster of 40.

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

GAMECUBE, 2003

■ This experimental title required players to pick two racers which could be freely swapped during the race, and karts were also chosen separately. Special weapons for each racer were also included, for regular players as well as the CPU.

MARIO KART ARCADE GP 2

ARCADE, 2007

■ This is more of an update than a full-blown sequel, featuring the original game's content as well as new items, racers, tracks and a somewhat irritating colour commentator. Unlike the original, export models allowed players to use magnetic memory cards.

MARIO KART DS

DS, 2005

■ The second handheld *Mario Kart* game was Nintendo's big step into the world of online gaming, offering friends the chance to play against one another without bundling onto a sofa together. The inclusion of retro tracks was also made into a permanent fixture here.

MARIO KART ARCADE GP

ARCADE, 2005

■ The first coin-op instalment in the series was developed by Namco and included Pac-Man as a special guest racer. A ridiculous 93 items are included, and for the first time since the original, on-track coins make their return.

MARIO KART WII

WII, 2008

■ Races were bumped up to 12 participants here, with widened tracks to accommodate the added competition. For the first time, players could choose to use motorbikes instead of karts, and motion controls mimicking the use of a steering wheel were added.

MARIO KART 7

3DS, 2011

■ Codeveloped by Retro Studios and Nintendo EAD, this game returned coins to the main series after a lengthy absence, and added underwater and gliding sections. It was also possible to build your kart from three main components – body, wheels and glider.

MARIO KART ARCADE GP DX

ARCADE, 2013

■ This major overhaul of the *Mario Kart Arcade GP* series adds heavy modifications to existing track layouts, including the addition of underwater and gliding sections. It's also still being updated today, and can be found in Western arcades.

MARIO KART 8 DELUXE

SWITCH, 2017

■ This enhanced version of *Mario Kart 8* includes all the Wii U version's DLC, a revamped Battle Mode with new courses including a *Splatoon*-themed arena, new characters and the ability to hold two items at once. Visuals are also upgraded to 1080p.

MARIO KART 8

WII U, 2014

■ The first *Mario Kart* of the HD era adds anti-gravity sections, allowing for impossible twists and loops. Bikes make their return and ATVs debut, while DLC adds representation for other Nintendo properties including *F-Zero*, *Zelda*, *Animal Crossing* and *Excitebike*.

GREEN SHELL

■ Once fired, this projectile weapon will continue in a straight path until it hits a wall, at which point it'll rebound off. It's a key item for experienced racers with deadly aim.

RED SHELL

■ Hitting a wall will stop your Red Shell, but if you fired it at the right time it won't do that, because Red Shells home in on nearby racers for a deadly strike.

BOO

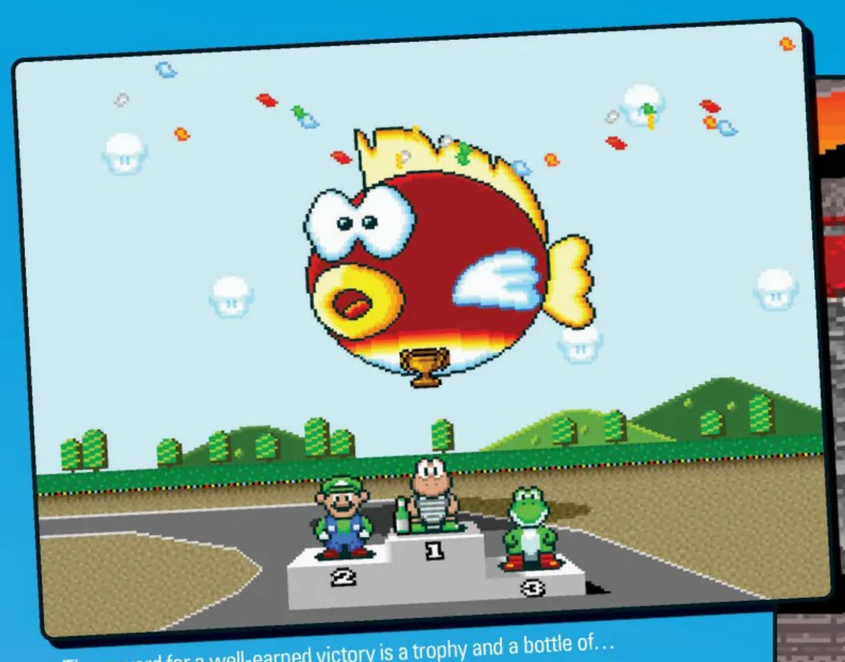
■ Using the Boo will give you a ghostly countenance, turning you invisible and allowing you to pass through other racers – but stealing your opponent's item is the best bit.

COIN

■ Pulling the trigger on this item will give you a couple of coins, boosting your top speed for as long as you happen to hold on to them and giving you an edge on your competitors.

LIGHTNING

■ This exceptionally uncommon item causes huge commotion, shrinking enemy racers except for the user. From there, they're slow and easy to squash with your wheels.



» The reward for a well-earned victory is a trophy and a bottle of… what do Koopas drink?

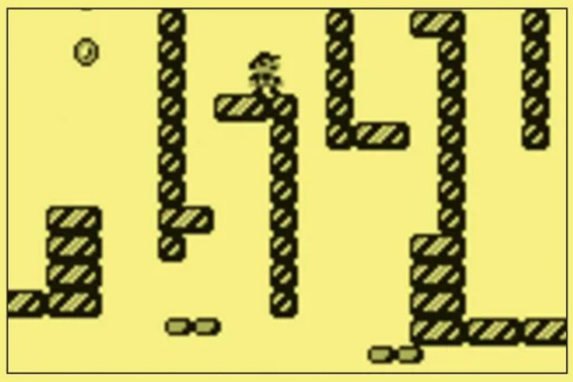
» Sliding around corners is a key skill for any *Super Mario Kart* player to master.

tool' – a way to connect with others though multiplayer – back before network multiplayer was popular, and got really into the game, playing it over a long time, including the parts like time trials that can be played over and over."

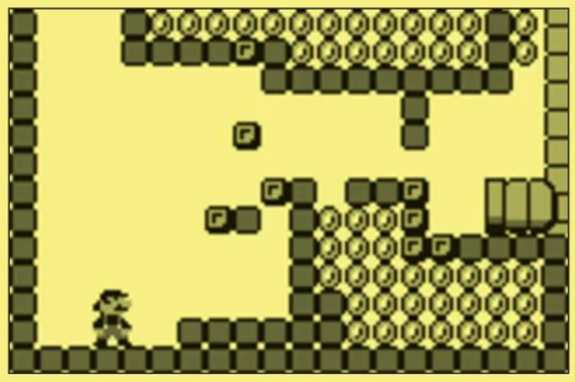
While other companies might have been tempted to cash in on the success of *Super Mario Kart* with a quick sequel, Nintendo exhibited great restraint with the series – in part because the original game was pushing the boundaries of what was possible on the SNES. The first sequel to the 16-bit original wasn't created until 1996, when *Mario Kart 64* could take advantage of new technology to radically alter track design. This sequel proved that the original was no one-hit wonder, and many more followed – although never more than one per hardware generation, ensuring that the series stays special. With eight main games having been made, the *Mario Kart* series stands at over 100 million sales.

With such a history of success behind the *Mario Kart* series, we're keen to know how Nintendo tries to maintain the legacy of the original when creating the sequels. For Sugiyama, there's one key ingredient. "*Mario Kart* is not *Mario Kart* without the items. The opportunities that come from using the items mean that both skilled and unskilled players can play this game together," he says. "A key characteristic of *Mario Kart* is how it's often the case that you can't win just with your driving skills alone, with the races being very close as everyone does everything they can to get over the finish line first." Although he hasn't been hands-on with the series since 2003's *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*, it's clear to see that the designers of subsequent games agree with his philosophy of bringing players of disparate skill levels together.

"We aimed to create a game that's fun to play with family, friends, with everyone," concurs Konno, who has remained involved with the series right through to *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe*. "We tried to design the game so everyone could enjoy the thrill of driving, and everyone could have a chance to win, but playing it a lot will still put you on top. The first *Mario Kart* title had split-screen multiplayer, and with Nintendo DS it became possible to play with eight players over wireless communication, and with people from across the world online. This is the most important element that's been carried over from the concepts of the original *Mario Kart* game."



» A beautiful example of the simple but effective design in *Super Mario Land*. Look at the structure and usage of platforms. Amazing.



» Shoot a fireball through the holes and watch as it collects all the coins for you.

» Look closely at Mario. Closer! He's replicating Phil Collin's body moves in the music video to I Can't Dance.

limited palette the 1Up mushroom is replaced with a heart – a different but equally recognisable icon. It may seem strange to say, but there is no wastage in *SML* – no grotesque excess and no superficiality to distract from the perfectly formed core. In this way *SML* acutely represents many of the things people like about and seek in retro games: abstract minimalism which isn't contrived, highly refined mechanics, and a purity of design which gives the impression that every block and every coin's position has been agonised over.

This high quality is not surprising when you consider the all-star development team. Along with Hirokazu "Hip" Tanaka on sound, the man behind *Metroid*'s music and highly experienced in working with limited audio architecture, there were other people of significance. The producer and man who oversaw the project was not Shigeru Miyamoto but Gunpei Yokoi

"SUPER MARIO LAND'S MAGNIFICENCE RESULTS FROM ITS MINIMALIST PURITY; EVERYTHING'S STRIPPED BACK TO THE BARE ESSENTIALS, YET IS STILL RECOGNISABLE"

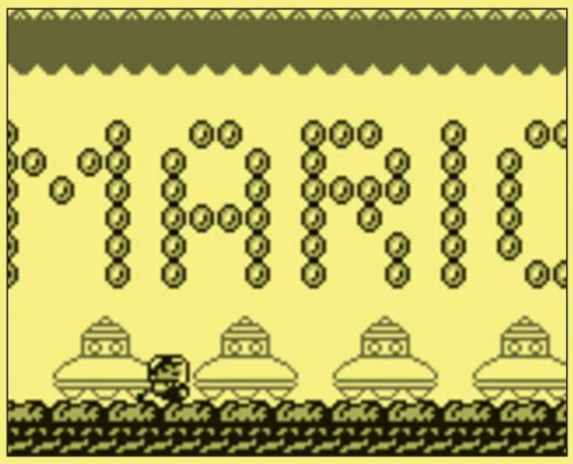
» Hit the block and then watch as the mushroom sails through the air. Eating one increases your size.

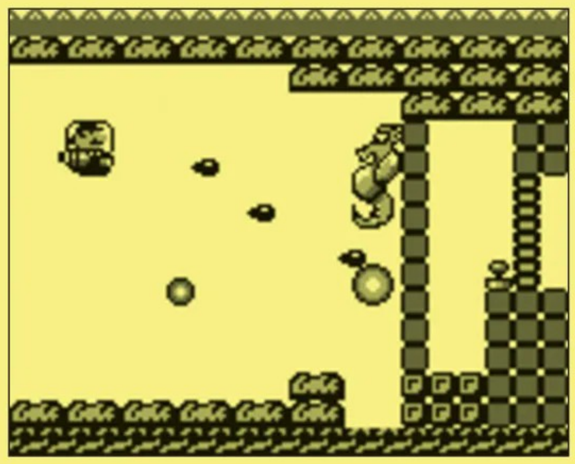
– the mentor of Miyamoto and also the man who designed the Game Boy. If anyone was suited to making use of what the Game Boy offered, it was Yokoi. He understood the GB's limitations and so expertly worked within them. Others who had a hand in design were Satoru Okada (worked on *Metroid* and is head of the division behind most of Nintendo's handheld systems) and Hirofumi Matsuoka (*Metroid* and *WarioWare*). These were some of Nintendo's best, and it's unsurprising they created a launch title for the new hardware.

There are some great moments throughout, like the urgency after killing turtles since their shells explode. Fireballs bounce diagonally off every surface and also collect coins. Because they continue bouncing, it allows strategic destruction of enemies from far off, via rebound hits, and also the ability to get distant coins. This coin ability dramatically changes the entire game dynamic; it was a revolution of the traditional *Mario* ethic, though curiously it was never adopted by any of the later iterations. The magnitude of this addition cannot be over-emphasised, refreshing the traditional formula and proving to be incredibly fun.

All of this highlights how exaggerated the importance and skill of Miyamoto is, to the point where he overshadows so many of Nintendo's other equally capable visionaries. The combined efforts of Okada and Matsuoka on *SML* were exceptional, being great fun and wonderfully refreshing. It's shameful then that the sequel, *6 Golden Coins*, saw the original development team replaced and also abandoned so many of the original's cool ideas, in a hopeless and almost nauseating attempt to pander to the fans of, and copy ad-hoc, Miyamoto's NES versions. *SML* in retrospect is a bizarre and isolated off-shoot of the main series, which could have easily starred a new protagonist, and has sadly been almost forgotten over the years.

We're not suggesting that *Super Mario Land* is the best *Mario* game ever (technically, it's not even a true *Mario* game), or even that it's more than simply very good. We're suggesting that it symbolises an important way of thinking about game design, focusing on making the best use of the resources available. These are things forgotten by today's developers and, as handhelds move closer to consoles in terms of power (eerily reminiscent of consoles encroaching on arcades in the past), we can't help but feel pangs of nostalgia for the days when handheld games didn't simply mimic portable console games. These were days when handheld games were unique, specially created for their format: the days when *Super Mario Land* was appreciated without developers asking "what if we made it bigger?"





» This is Marine Pop, Mario's own custom submarine. *Super Mario Land* is the only game in the series to feature controllable submarines and aeroplanes.

TAINTED LOVE?

Are the Mario brothers overweight, moustachioed, latter-day Lotharios? Surely this is the question parents would ask if only they'd take a closer look at the products peddled by Nintendo. In *Super Mario Land* there is the introduction of a second love interest for Mario, namely Princess Daisy of Sarasaland (the other being Princess Toadstool and Peach who are both one and the same princess, though are perhaps two deranged polar-opposite personalities contained within one alternating being of domineering wickedness and submissive obedience – depending on which demented fan-fiction you read). Contorting the issue of Mario's sordid liaisons is that Daisy is rumoured to be involved with Luigi (who also seems infatuated with Mario's Peach). We're not sure if she hooked up with Luigi after her rendezvous with Mario, or if she already knew Luigi and Mario was having an affair with her behind his brother's back. Or perhaps they were all involved, like some kind of depraved swingers club, hooped-up on Magic Mushrooms in the "Mushroom Kingdom".

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RADAR SCOPE
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1980

SUPER MARIO LAND 2
SYSTEMS: GAME BOY
YEAR: 1992

MARIO AND WARIO
SYSTEMS: SNES
YEAR: 1993

Mario Is Missing!

CALL OFF THE SEARCH

» RETROREVIVAL

» NES » The Software Toolworks » 1993

I love seeing younger people getting into retro gaming, but they do sometimes seem to miss the context a little. It's pretty easy to acquire a well-known duffer and make a mocking YouTube video, which will invariably contain the line "How could anyone buy this?". Well kids, let me tell you how that happens.

As the PlayStation and N64 gained popularity, my local video shop was selling off old Mega Drive and NES stock to clear the shelves. I had a PlayStation by this point, but I was a teenager with little disposable income and the games were being sold for £4 each, so I raided that place. With access to review books from *Sega Pro* and *Mean Machines Sega*, I ended up cherry-picking a whole bunch of great games including *Virtua Racing* and *Street Fighter II: Special Champion Edition*.

But with Nintendo, I wasn't so prepared. My NES was a recent arrival, a hand-me-down from a cousin, and I was ignorant as to what was available. Worse yet, so were my friends – we'd all grown up swapping Master System games. This made it rather hard to evaluate the white rental box with "Mario Is Missing!" scrawled on it. I'd just pull out my phone and look online these days, but neither mobile phones nor internet connections were commonplace back then, so I went with my limited knowledge of Nintendo. Mario is always good, right?

Wrong. I'd picked up one of those dreaded 'edutainment' games, in which Luigi wanders around various cities, retrieves cultural artefacts and answers trivia questions. Needless to say, it wasn't the experience I expected – but how was I to know? ✱

SUPER MARIO BROS 3

Many consider Mario's third NES adventure to be one of his greatest. Join Ashley Day as he makes a case for why those fans are probably still correct

Instant Expert

Prior to its release, *Super Mario Bros 3* was revealed to the public through a canny piece of product placement in Hollywood movie *The Wizard*

At one stage in development Nintendo considered a centaur suit for Mario. This was later dropped in favour of the raccoon suit

Although the Koopalings are all named after celebrities, their appearances were based upon seven of the programmers working under Shigeru Miyamoto

At 17 million copies sold, *Super Mario Bros 3* remains one of the bestselling non-bundle games ever released. The Virtual Console version and the GBA release have sold a further 1 million and 5 million copies respectively

The idea of *Mario 3*'s ingenious overworld map was later used again, albeit in simplified form, in *Super Mario World*, and was more accurately copied in both *New Super Mario Bros* games

Super Mario Bros 3 is one of only ten games to be preserved in the US Library of Congress's Game Canon initiative. It is the only Japanese game in the list

The idea of different 'suits' for Mario to wear, rather than simple power-ups, later resurfaced in *Super Mario Galaxy*'s bee, boo and spring suits

Whether you were wealthy enough to afford one or not when it was first released, the NES was undeniably a landmark turning point for videogames. After the primacy of the Atari 2600, the clumsy DIY feel of Spectrum and C64 games, and the daunting inaccessibility of the arcades, Nintendo's unassuming grey box came along and changed everything with one simple rule: make games fun. Not every game was great, of course, but every game that Nintendo created was easy to pick up and play, controlled with a confident slickness, presented a challenge without ever being unfair, and positioned the videogame as a wondrous window into another world filled with a sense of discovery and joy. NES games were what videogames should have been all along – it's just that nobody realised until the day they were faced with them.

The crown jewel of this era is undoubtedly *Super Mario Bros 3*. While the two previous *Mario* games had been exceptional adventures when compared to those games available on other systems of the time, *Super Mario Bros 3* was exceptional when compared to Nintendo's own achievements. It took the template laid out by the original *Super Mario Bros* and expanded it in every possible direction, resulting in a bigger, longer, deeper and even taller videogame. Its seemingly never-ending wealth of interactions epitomised the NES software catalogue and established the *Mario* series as something truly special in the world of videogames.

It might not have seemed like such a revolutionary game at first glance, since the opening few seconds were almost exactly the same as *Super Mario Bros*. The player is put in control of a diminutive Mario, with a paltry two commands – run or jump – at his disposal, the ability to eat a mushroom to grow in size, and the same old enemies – the Goomba and Koopa Troopa – to take on in the same old way. Only a fresh lick of paint indicated that this was a different game at all.

Play Choice

But even within that first level, there are a couple of hints of the greatness to come. Around halfway through, we come across the first of many new power-ups, a leaf that illogically transforms Mario into a raccoon, complete with ears and stripy tail. Even more illogically, we discover that running at high speed for long enough while dressed in the raccoon suit will cause Mario to lift from the ground and fly through the air, eventually leading to a hidden batch of coins high above the ground. And, with that, the tone is set for a game that has a new surprise around every corner and a secret treat to discover where most games would make do with the rudimentary and the obvious.

Nintendo and, more accurately, Shigeru Miyamoto, had played

Pixel Perfect

The many sumptuous sprites of Super Mario Bros 3

» Mario

» Super Mario

» Luigi

» Tanooki Mario

» Fire Mario

» Frog Mario

» Hammer Mario

» Raccoon Mario

» Bob-omb

» Bullet Bill

» Buzzy Beetle

» Blooper

» Boomerang Bros

» Boo

» Chain Chomp

» Goomba

» Hammer Bros

» Cheep Cheep

» Jelectro

» Dry Bones

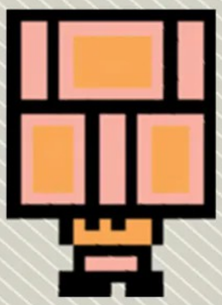
» Koopa Troopa (Green)

» Koopa Paratroopa (Green)

» Koopa Troopa (Red)

» Kuribo Goomba

» Lakitu


» Micro Goomba

» Paragoomba

» Piranha Plant

» Rocky Wrench

» Sledge Bros

» Spike

» Spiny

» Statue Mario

» Thwomp

» Iggy

» Larry

» Lemmy

» Ludwig

» Morton

» Roy

» Wendy

» Bowser

Super Mario RPG

Legend Of The Seven Stars

1996 marked the end of the road for the SNES, but Nintendo wasn't about to let it go down without a fight. Sorrel Tilley caught up with director Chihiro Fujioka to get the scoop on Super Mario's super swansong

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **» DEVELOPER:** SQUARE
- **» RELEASED:** 1996
- **» PLATFORM:** SNES
- **» GENRE:** RPG

There's no denying it. Life was sweet for the SNES owner. Within the space of just five years, the system's library was swollen with classics, and chief among them were masterpieces crafted by Square and Nintendo. The mere mention of the likes of *Final Fantasy VI*, *Chrono Trigger* and *Super Mario World* are enough to send most gamers into paroxysms of nostalgia. It is said that all good things must come to an end, but even as the sun was setting on the SNES, behind closed doors the movers and shakers were planning something unprecedented – a collaboration between two of the biggest developers of the era.

The result of this partnership was Nintendo's moustachioed mascot's first foray in the role-playing genre. Square's own Chihiro Fujioka recalls how it went down: "The original idea was decided in meetings at the highest level. When I was put in charge, it had already been set in stone, but I heard that the background to it was that due to the very close relationship between Nintendo and Square in those days, working together on a project meant they would combine their respective strong suits – the Mario character and RPG development."

The basic concept was a simple one; its execution was not. Taking a beloved figurehead and throwing him headlong into a new genre without upsetting the fans requires a lot of thought, as Fujioka explains: "The world view and the story changed completely. In the beginning, we thought Mario would be fighting using weapons and magic, but as you'd expect, we concluded that Mario was more suited to the hammer and jumping, so we modified the settings and the story. Even after development had moved on, we were still beating our heads over whether or not Mario should use weapons and magic. Mr Miyamoto also seemed to be in two minds over this. It was only when we both took to the stage at a magazine event that we finally decided.

"It was at the V-Jump Festival, an event organised by Shueisha's monthly game and hobby magazine. Readers were invited to the venue so that publishers could introduce games that were about to be released. It was here that *Super Mario RPG* was revealed to the world for the first time – I remember how surprised the readers and the organisers were. Right at the time of this magazine event, we had to decide on Mario's fighting style – weapons and magic, or jumping and hammers? Even while we were backstage at the event, Mr Miyamoto and I were still talking it over. Then, when it became our turn to introduce our game, I said: 'Let's just decide his fighting style based on how much the

Dr.MARIO

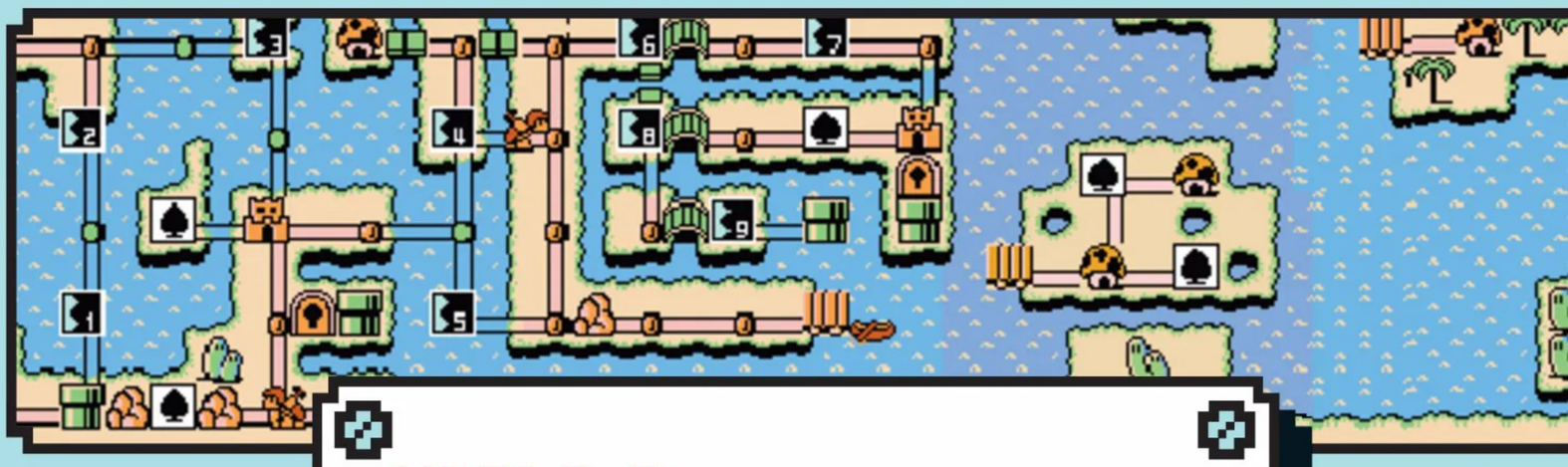
LEVEL
08

SPEED
LOW

VIRUS
34

World Tour

The Mushroom Kingdom has been represented in many different ways throughout *Mario* history, but *Super Mario Bros 3* was the first time it was presented in so much detail. Here's how it stacked up, from interactive map screens to the levels themselves and their climactic boss battles.

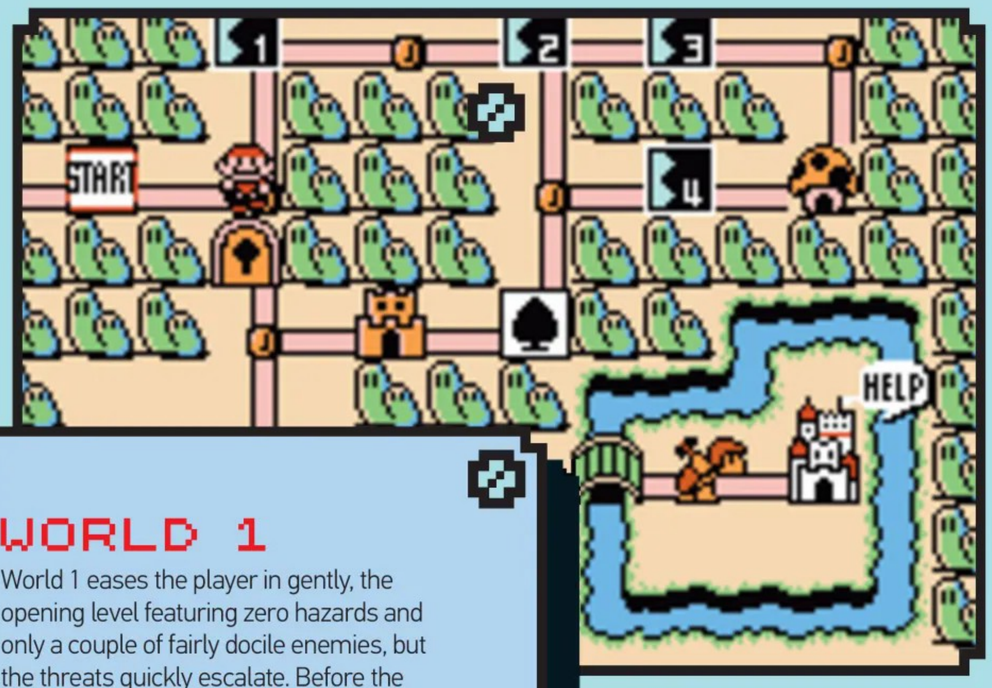


WORLD 3

The third world is almost entirely made up of water-based levels, always some of the trickiest stages in *Mario* games, especially when there's a giant fish leaping out of the depths in an attempt to swallow him whole. Thankfully, however, our hero has a new trick up his sleeve in the form of the Frog Suit, which grants him enhanced swimming and jumping abilities.

BOSS: Wendy

Bowser's only daughter awaits Mario at the end of World 3, and she's no princess, let us tell you. Like her brothers, her weapon of choice is a wand, and this one fires what look like life rings. Wendy is named after Wendy O Williams, lead singer of punk outfit The Plasmatics.

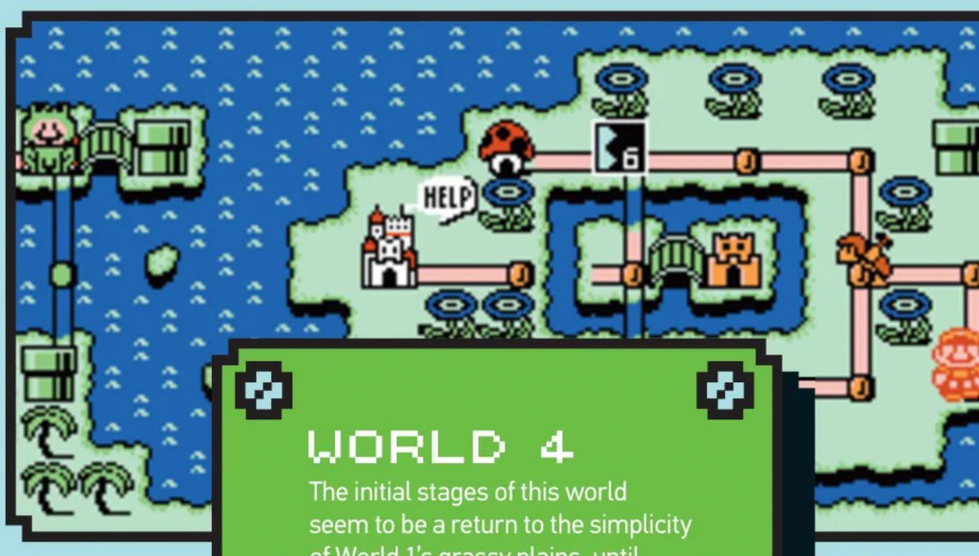


WORLD 1

World 1 eases the player in gently, the opening level featuring zero hazards and only a couple of fairly docile enemies, but the threats quickly escalate. Before the world is through you'll have contended with slippery ice slopes toward oblivion, an assault from the pesky Boomerang Bros, and a madcap dash through an airship as cannonballs shoot at you from all directions. Phew!

BOSS: Iggy

One of Bowser's seven children known as the Koopalings, Iggy is named after real-life rocker Iggy Pop. But that's not a microphone in his hand: it's a deadly magic wand that he wants to shoot at Mario. Thankfully, he's quite easy to dodge and, a trio of head stomps later, he'll be out of the game.



WORLD 2

World 2's desert landscapes throw some truly unexpected enemies at you, including a teeny tiny Goomba that hides underneath blocks of sand. One level introduces the now-customary Boo enemy, a ghost that will stop pursuing you as long as you look it in the eye. And in another stage you're even attacked by the sun itself. Weird.

BOSS: Morton

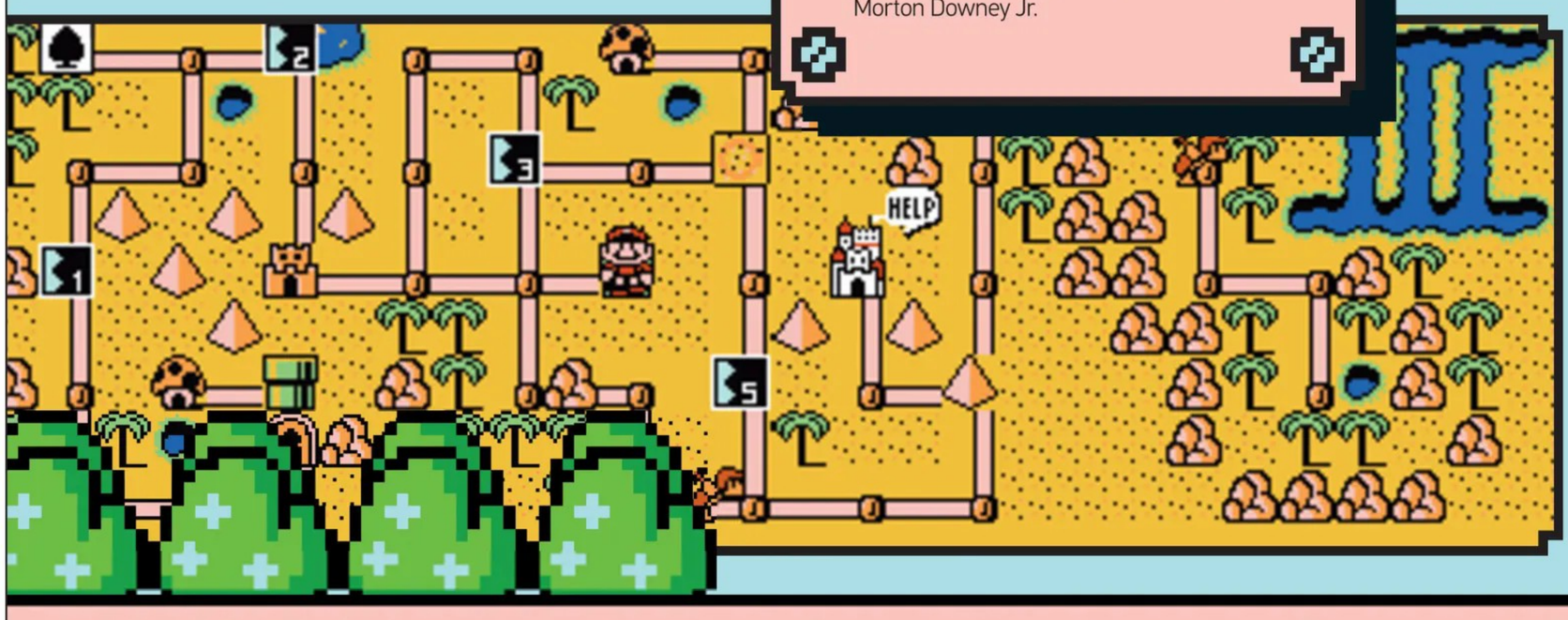
Not that much more troubling than his brother Iggy, Morton also wields a wand but is able to throw out multiple bouncing projectiles at once. Also named after a real-life musician, he takes his name from American singer and talk show host Morton Downey Jr.

WORLD 4

The initial stages of this world seem to be a return to the simplicity of World 1's grassy plains, until you see the enemies, who are now several times bigger than ever before. Thankfully, however, lots of other things have grown in size, including the clouds, which are now big enough for Mario to safely jump onto.

BOSS: Larry

Another boss, another Koopaling, another boring old magic wand. There's not much challenge here, but World 4 itself is tough enough that you'll welcome the downtime. Larry is the only Koopaling not to be named after a musician. Instead, he's named after talk show host Larry King.

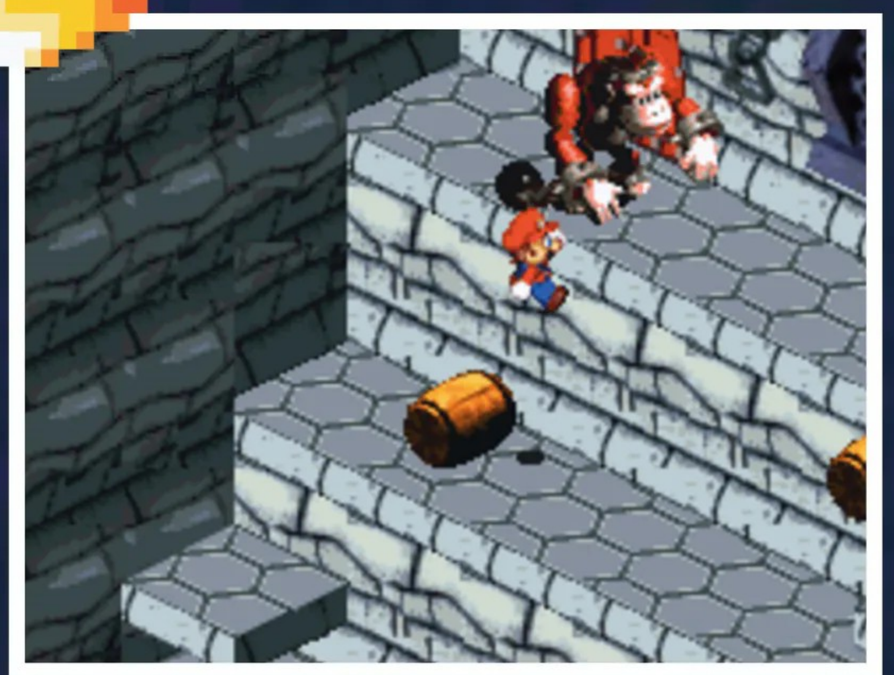


» Why does nobody respect Bowser's authoritah?

for those calculations. It also allowed us to use more characters than usual."

The game was primarily a Square production, but Nintendo made sure the team was not left floundering with Mario's transition to a new dimension and genre. "It was a very close and favourable relationship. They offered us support with various new techniques, starting with the SA-1 chip, and ideas for presenting pseudo-3D on the Super Famicom," Fujioka recalls. "From the beginning, Mr Miyamoto came in often to meet and talk, and of course we even took to the stage together at V-Jump. I received advice from him on two main points: one was keeping an eye on handling Mario's entry into the RPG world without destroying the *Mario* universe; the other was the actual concept of fun in the game – in the early stages of development, I proposed the gameplay that *Super Mario RPG* would revolve around, explaining: 'I want to achieve something that everybody wants to do, but nobody has been able to.' Mr Miyamoto approved."

Fujioka remembers another time that Miyamoto gave him advice while writing the script for moving yellow blocks in the game. Miyamoto noticed that it was possible for the player to easily slip and fall from these blocks, and suggested that Fujioka try making them stop for a split second when Mario landed. "I revised the code immediately, and the gameplay really improved. It was a great experience to be able to see first-hand Mr Miyamoto's fixation on game controls.



» Square doffs its cap to *Donkey Kong Country*'s graphical influence here.

» As well as all-new characters and enemies, traditional series tropes were re-imagined in new roles for *Super Mario RPG*.

> Super Mario RPG's cast of characters and lighthearted story and script won over gamers and critics alike

"This was a difficult area – how much of the action aspect of Mario to represent in an RPG and, further, how to actually achieve that. With regards to programming and scripting, almost all the events in the game had some kind of interactive gameplay, and customising the code for them one by one was a big job. 3D data was also created for everything from the backgrounds to the characters and items, but it was our first experience with that, so it was an incredibly tough job."

Even with a 4MB cartridge and the SA-1 chip, the game was bursting at the seams: "In terms of the game's content, there's one thing that even the development staff might have forgotten about. There were plans to include a shape-shifting boss character in the second half of the game, which would morph during battle. I persuaded the coders to put together a morphing program, which they made at once. However, I've now forgotten what his original form looked like! I did prepare two sketches for this boss, but I get the feeling they were completely altered during testing." Unfortunately, at that time, it was necessary to trim many areas from the ROM capacity, and the morphing boss became nothing more than a phantom character.

"There were a good number of other early ideas that didn't make it into the final game, but it would be more accurate to say that they were starting points, rather than things we couldn't do – they changed throughout the course of developing the game. For example, we wanted to have Mario use devices in one part of the map that would have a domino effect on various devices in other parts of the map, so in the early days, 'chain reaction' was something of a keyword that we based our ideas around. Expanding from that, we got all the areas with events that focus on action."

Super Mario RPG isn't only known for its technical accomplishments, however – its cast of characters and lighthearted story and script won over gamers and critics alike. Even Mario's long-time nemesis, Bowser, was given his first comedy role. Rather than kidnapping Peach and menacing the player characters, he teams up with them and spends his time alternately weeping over his stolen castle, reciting haikus about being lonely, and trying to convince everybody that Mario has joined his gang. "Mr Miyamoto didn't stipulate

» The eagle-eyed will spot plenty of Nintendo character cameos.

audience applauds.' Mr Miyamoto replied doubtfully, 'Is that going to be okay?' but we went along with the plan anyway."

"To tell the truth, though, there was a feeling, among the staff too, that it would be best if Mario fought with hammers and jumping. Actually asking the audience was a big gamble, but I came up with a bit of a scheme to make sure things went our way. First, I said suddenly, but in a normal, businesslike voice: 'Could you please clap if you think that because this time Mario is in an RPG, it would be good if he used weapons and magic.' Small applause. Next, in a loud voice, full of energy and excitement: 'But of course this is Mario, so it'd be way better if he fought with jumps and hammers, right? Those people – applaud now!' Lots of applause. And that's how it turned out. Mr Miyamoto – sorry for worrying you!"

Mario's unexpected appearance in an RPG aside, audiences were wowed by his new 3D look. The team had been hard at work on the same Silicon Graphics workstations that Nintendo had authorised Rare to purchase for its *Donkey Kong Country* series. Although a rudimentary 2D version of the game was created, it was used mainly as a testing ground for Mario's movement and abilities before plans for the switch to 3D were finalised.

"At that point in time, Square was putting a lot of effort into visual presentation, and they had really pursued this up to the limits of what the Super Famicom hardware could do with 2D methods," explains Fujioka. "The big question was where to go from there. I think it was natural that things would go in the direction of 3D. When I think about it now, the whole of Square was headed that way. Of course, in the beginning, we had a traditional top-down map with a 2D Mario, but at a fairly early stage we revised it to a slanted 3D perspective, so after that we also had to make the entire graphic design follow suit. Even with the SA-1 chip, the Super Famicom wasn't capable of displaying 3D in real-time, so we went with a pre-rendering technique."

> In the beginning, we thought Mario would fight using magic, but we concluded that he was more suited to the hammer and jumping

This SA-1 chip was another weapon in Nintendo's arsenal of enhancements that kept SNES games evolving over time. While Sega was developing pricey add-on systems to prevent the Mega Drive from becoming stale, Nintendo opted to boost its hardware with special co-processor chips included within the game cartridges themselves. Possibly the most famous of these was the Super FX chip, which handled the real-time 3D effects in games such as *Star Fox* and *Stunt Race FX*. The Super Accelerator 1 was less common outside Japan, with only three games seeing international release. "The SA-1 chip had four times the processing power of the Super Famicom," Fujioka elaborates. "Adding that to the console's CPU made five times the processing power possible. *Super Mario RPG* didn't use polygons, but the whole thing utilised a 3D field, so we used the extra oomph

MOONLIGHTING MARIO

Is there a genre that Mario hasn't dabbled in? No...

Mario Paint

MARIO WENT all arty-farty back in '92. His music generator remains popular on YouTube.

Yoshi's Safari

MARIO GOT trigger-happy in this Super Scope rail shooter that also featured his dinosaur sidekick.

Mario & Wario

USE THE mouse to save a bucket-headed Mario – from himself!

Dr Mario

PRESCRIPTION PADS at the ready for this pill-poppin' puzzler.

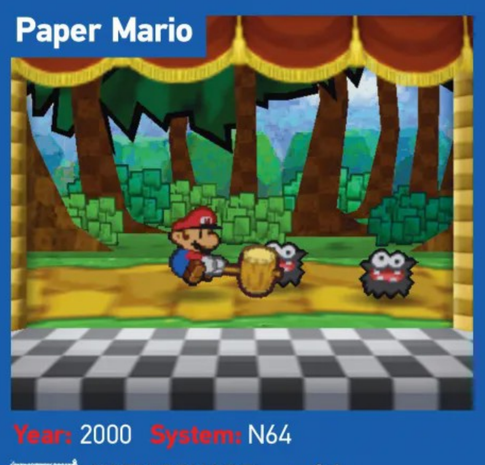
Mario No Photopi

ONLY THE Japanese got this N64 photo-manipulation package.

MORE MARIO RPG SPIN-OFFS

When Square got into bed with Sony, Mario's role-playing future looked uncertain. Fans were overjoyed, then, when they got not one but two spin-off series

Paper Mario



Year: 2000 **System:** N64

WITH SQUARE out of the picture, a change of title was called for, so *Super Mario RPG 2* became *Paper Mario*. Just like its forebear, this game was released late in the system's life, and showed off some striking visuals, albeit in a different way – Mario was now flat as a pancake!

Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door

Year: 2004 **System:** GameCube

INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS' second game was also critically praised. It had a greater emphasis on gameplay based around the paper theme, with Mario using curses to fold himself into aeroplanes, boats and tubes. Side-scrolling sections featuring Bowser paved the way for the Wii sequel.

Super Paper Mario

Year: 2007 **System:** Wii

THE SERIES' third instalment continued to surprise gamers by toying with notions of 2D and 3D. *Super Paper Mario* returns the plumber to his platforming roots, but with a twist – the ability to switch between 2D and 3D perspectives at will. A sequel is due for the 3DS this year.

Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga

Year: 2003 **System:** Game Boy Advance

CREATED BY AlphaDream with the involvement of Fujioka, this is often regarded as the true successor to *Super Mario RPG*. Why? "Maybe because it has the same battle system, musician (Yoko Shimomura) and comical story style. It's for handhelds and features Luigi, so I think t can coe st with *Paper Mario*."

Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time

Year: 2005 **System:** Nintendo DS

AS YOU might expect, *Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time* used the dual screens to expand on Mario and Luigi's interaction from the first game. The appearance of Baby Mario and Baby Luigi allowed for puzzles requiring the co-ordination of all four characters to solve this time-travelling adventure.

Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story

Year: 2009 **System:** Nintendo DS

The latest game in the series took on an *Innerspace*-style dynamic, with the Italian duo being miniaturised and inhaled by Bowser. Will we see a fourth title in the series, possibly on the 3DS? Fujioka says: "This is still undecided. I'd be happy if we received a lot of requests to continue. Please root for us!"

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SECRET OF MANA (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: SNES
YEAR: 1993

FINAL FANTASY
SYSTEM: NES
YEAR: 1987

XENOGEARS
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1998

any rules; he pretty much gave us a free hand, although he did let us know which series characters he wanted to appear," remembers Fujioka. "There were a lot of staff members who were fans of comedy and stand-up, so it was only natural that it would end up that way. Bowser's various lines and facial expressions were created freely by the people in charge of each area and event. It was all fine because Mr Miyamoto didn't get angry!"

One of the most enduring original characters to spring from the game was Geno. Although legal issues between Square and Nintendo have prevented a full-blown comeback for the wooden boy, he has maintained a cult following. "I only found out about Geno's popularity later, so I got him to make a reappearance in *Superstar Saga* [laughs]. I wish I knew why he's so popular! I think people are interested in him because he's a doll that's come to life – he seems to have something of the profound about him."

Super Mario RPG was released just months before the Nintendo 64 went on sale and was an immediate success: "It was the point at which the highest number of gamers owned a Super Famicom and, thanks to this, we sold a *lot* of copies. On the other hand, with the N64 out and Square defecting to the PlayStation, we never got to make a true sequel."

On top of this, working on Mario's last game on the SNES must have been a bittersweet experience. "We had no idea!" admits Fujioka. Indeed, when Miyamoto announced at the V-Jump Festival that the game would be Mario's final 16-bit outing, Fujioka's reaction was short and comical: "What!?"

WORLD 6

World 6 is where things really start to get tough. Icy surfaces, spiked floors and multiple enemy types all crowded into the screen make it very easy for Mario to meet his demise if you don't keep precise control over him at all times. Prepare to use a fair few continues in this world.

BOSS: Lemmy

Riding around on a huge rubber ball, Lemmy causes trouble for Mario by launching several other bouncy balls at him. It's utter chaos and pretty difficult to get through in one piece. We'll forgive Lemmy, though, simply because he's named after the legendary lead singer of UK metallers Motörhead.

WORLD 5

While the first half of the fifth world takes place in familiar grassland territory, the second half sends Mario up into the air to explore the clouds. Being so high up, however, means only one thing: lots and lots of bottomless pits to fall into.

BOSS: Roy

One of the most dangerous of the Koopalings, Roy is able to stomp on the ground, sending out shockwaves that stun Mario into submission for a few seconds. Best to stay in the air, then. He's named after Roy Orbison. Of course.

WORLD 7

The penultimate world takes Mario back to his roots, with entire levels constructed from pipes. A double-edged sword: some pipes lead to beneficial secret areas while others simply house annoying enemies. Tread carefully, Mario.

BOSS: Ludwig

Second in command to Bowser himself, Ludwig is so heavy that every footstep is as powerful as Morton's stomps. He's named after Ludwig Van Beethoven, which was a source of amusement in the Mario cartoons as he tried and failed to compose pleasant classical music.

WORLD 8

Anyone who used Warp Whistles to cheat their way to the final world soon found that their skills were nowhere near up to the challenge, as Bowser's army attacks Mario with a mile-long caravan of gigantic tanks. This level, and the handful that followed, are some of the hardest in Mario's history.

BOSS: Bowser

King Koopa himself awaits Mario at the end of World 8, and he's suitably tough to beat. You can't actually hurt him, so dodge his fireballs and try to get him to stomp in the middle of the stage. If he does it enough he'll break the floor and fall into the lava below.

Memorable Moments

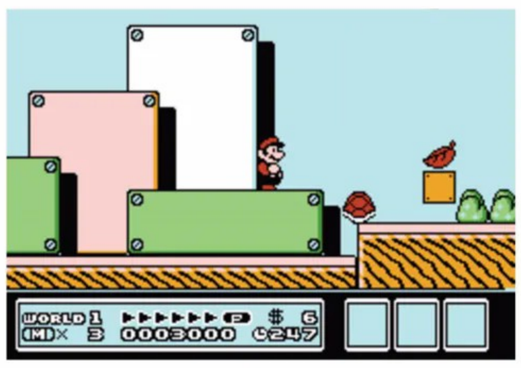
We present the best bits of the best NES game Nintendo ever made

Curtain Call

The intro to *Super Mario Bros 3* presents the entire game to the player as though it were a stage production, complete with spotlights and huge curtains. It's a weird premise that's never really explained, but it is one of the most memorable and iconic openings to any NES game.

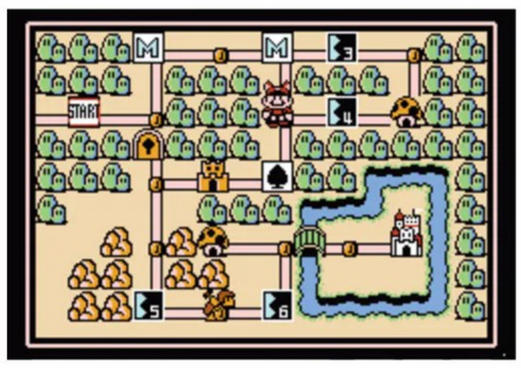
Hide And Seek

Crouch on any white block for a few seconds and Mario will fall off it and into the background layer of the stage. Sometimes it's just for fun; other times it can actually lead Mario to a very cool secret.



Question Blocked

A Question Block sits on the ground in the first stage, befuddling *Super Mario Bros* players who are only used to hitting the blocks from below. The solution: get a Koopa shell and throw it into the block. Genius.



Non-Linear

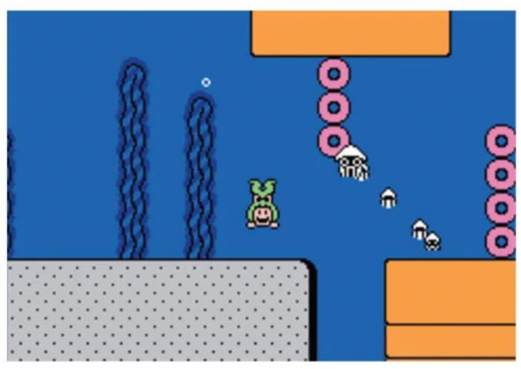
Get to a certain point in the World 1 map screen and it suddenly dawns on you that there's now a significant element of choice in *Super Mario Bros 3*. Four different options are available at this first junction alone.

Bum Rush

Pick up some speed and hold down on a slope like this and Mario will slide all the way down on his backside, taking out any enemies he hits during his descent. It's the sort of satisfying moment that *SMB3* does best.

'King Idiot

Cut-scenes in a 2D *Mario* game? Can you believe it? These pre-boss battle scenes were pretty cool, though, always showing the King of the Mushroom Kingdom transformed into something humiliating.

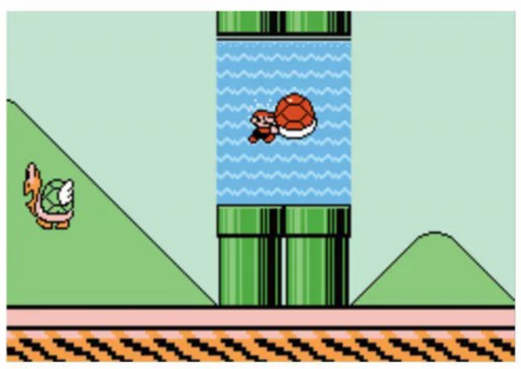


Hopping Mad

Super Mario Bros 3's Frog Suit is one of the most iconic power-ups of all time and was the stuff of legend back in the NES days. It felt so cool to mess around with, exploring underwater with fewer of the normal limitations.

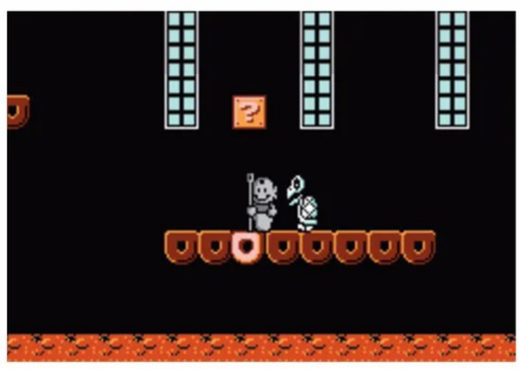
An Old Friend

Lakitu makes his return in *Super Mario Bros 3*, but we wouldn't call it a 'long-awaited' one. He's still an annoying little nuisance. His later relegation to cameraman and traffic light holder couldn't come soon enough.



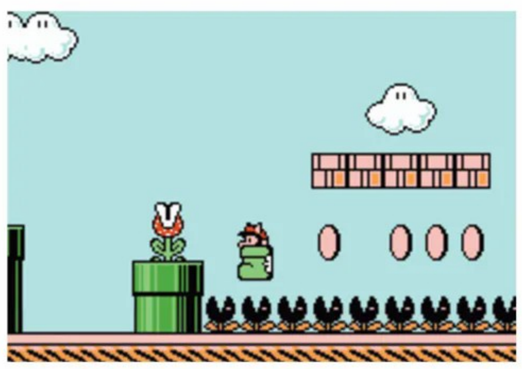
LittleBigMario

World 4's oversized level designs had a real wow factor in the NES days, even though they were really quite simple. The concept is so well-loved, though, that it was recently revived for *Super Mario Galaxy 2*.



Statue Mario

The Tanooki Suit is an enhanced form of Raccoon Mario that gives him fur all over in addition to the ears and the tail. Hold down and B while wearing the suit and Mario will turn into a statue, making him invincible.



Suited And Booted

The Kuribo Shoe is probably the rarest item in *Super Mario Bros 3*, only appearing in a couple of levels. It also has to be one of the weirdest power-ups in a *Mario* game. Do you think there's an old woman and her family in there too?

The ending to Super Mario Bros 3 isn't without its sense of humour, as Princess Peach demonstrates. Cheeky bugger!

Dr Mario

BORED OF TETRIS? WE PRESCRIBE A DOSE OF DR MARIO

RETROREVIVAL

» NES » NINTENDO » 1990

Drugs and Nintendo – two words that you wouldn't normally expect to see in such close proximity to each other. Unless you're discussing *Dr Mario*, of course, which saw Nintendo's R&D1 department dabble with prescription medicine when it set about dressing up *Tetris* in colourful hospital scrubs for the NES.

Throughout his prolific videogame career, *Mario* has assumed many different roles. He's taken up golf, took a stint as a boxing referee, and even tried his feet as a footballer, but in 1990 Nintendo's versatile butterball decided to ditch the world of plumbing to become a doctor. We're not sure whether there are many plumbing doctors in the world, but I guess you'd expect Mario to be an expert at solving any health problem that concerned leaking pipes. [Yuck. – Ed]

Dr Mario is basically a decent variant of *Tetris*, which finds Mario prescribing various coloured vitamin tablets for the player to stack up around nasty germs that are floating in their playfield. To kill a germ, the player must align four identical coloured vitamin parts, either alongside or on top of the germs, and must do this by rotating the vitamins so that pills of similar colours touch. The game ends once all the germs on screen have been successfully vanquished, so depending on the luck of the vitamin draw, sessions can end pretty quickly, without a long treatment.

Having the various colours to consider, rather than just stacking shapes à la *Tetris*, adds another element to *Dr Mario*'s gameplay, requiring far more thinking and careful planning to ensure success.

Thankfully, though, the game comes fitted with a handy options screen that allows you to set the virus level, to determine the number of germs that you have to kill, and choose the speed at which the vitamins cascade down the screen, making it easy to just pick up and get to grips with the gameplay.

Dr Mario is an under-appreciated gem. With its pitch-perfect difficulty, status as a novel twist on a puzzle classic, and its excellent two-player mode, if you're looking for a great puzzle game, this hypothetical doc recommends a course of *Dr Mario*.

Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought...

"Once you start playing you want to keep going, just to see what surprises are around the next corner! I ended up playing it all night!"

- **JULIAN RIGNALL,** MEAN MACHINES, 1991

Twin Galaxies High Scores

SPEED RUN
- **NAME:** RICHARD URETA
- **TIME:** 00:11:15

FASTEST FULL COMPLETION (NO WARP WHISTLES)
- **NAME:** KYLE GOEWERT
- **TIME:** 01:27:34

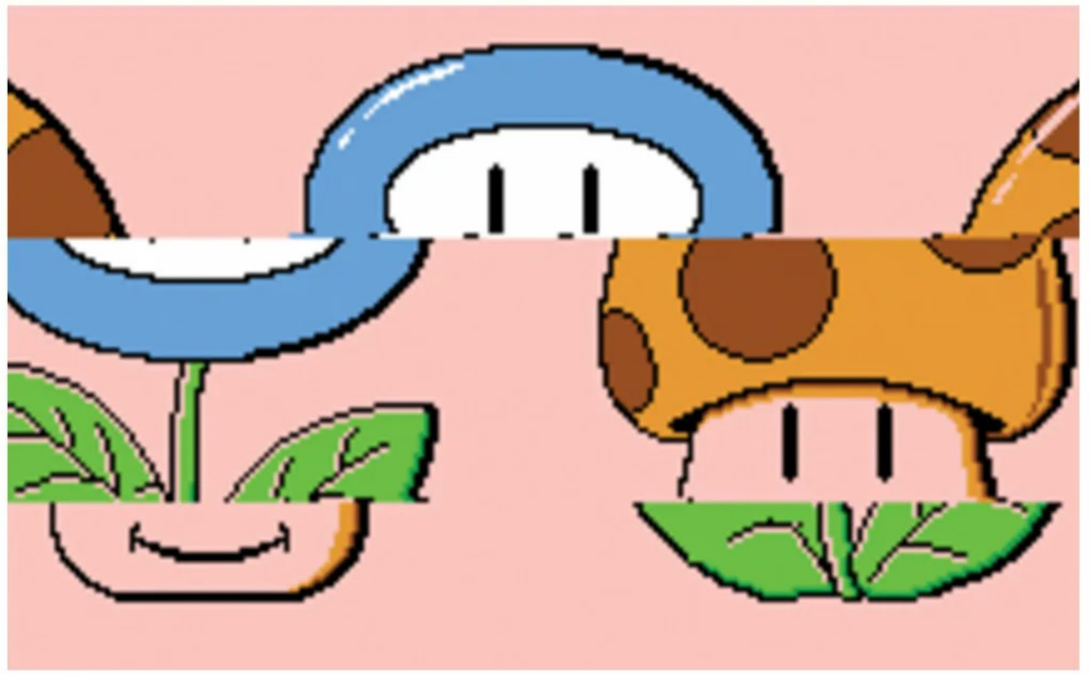
5 LIFE GAME
- **NAME:** KYLE GOEWERT
- **TIME:** 2,568,080

around with secrets before, of course. Who could forget the warp pipes of *Super Mario Bros*, accessed by running along the top of the level of World 1-2? Or the many secrets hidden behind the walls and bushes of Hyrule in *The Legend Of Zelda*? Miyamoto was famous for taking a childlike curiosity and sense of discovery and using it as inspiration for a videogame. And in *Super Mario Bros 3*, he turned that curiosity into an art form, every inch of the Mushroom Kingdom littered with secret areas and random events.

Not even the menus were safe from this playful sandbox feel. Rather than simply progress from one stage to another in *Mario 3*, the player was presented with a map screen somewhat akin to a board game, allowing them to move Mario around the board and actually *choose* which levels he would tackle next, take in some mini-game distractions, and figure out how to take a short cut or two. Take the Hammer Bros that wandered around the map screen, for example: bump into one and you'd be transported to a confrontation with two of the deadliest enemies in the *Mario* series. Most players would do everything to avoid them, but if you were brave enough to take them on and win you'd be rewarded with a random power-up that, if you were lucky, would be a hammer that could break certain rocks on the map and open up new routes to the end of the world.

Time Warp

And, of course, there was the Warp Whistle. Like the warp pipes of the first game, the whistle allowed experienced players to skip ahead to the more challenging later levels. But figuring out how to find those whistles was a much harder proposition. The first, for example, required the player to discover that it was possible to actually enter the background layer of the stage in World 1-3 by crouching on an unassuming white block for several seconds. Once into the background, Mario could run all the way along the stage, safe from enemy attack, and beyond the goal to a secret Toad House where he would be rewarded with a Warp Whistle.



» This sliding mini-game was one of several that could earn bonuses for the player between levels.

This trick was actually one of the simpler secrets to be uncovered in *Super Mario Bros 3*. One that transformed a wandering Hammer Brother into an airship, for example, could only be activated by finishing a level in a time with an even number at the end while also holding a multiple of 11 coins. Such formulae were cleverly used to give the game a mysterious feeling of randomness, while others, like the Warp Whistle secret, were more about engendering a sense of exploration in the player.

Either way, these secrets and random events made *Super Mario Bros 3* a game way ahead of its time. It was a game that could be played over and over again, each playthrough offering a new surprise over the last. It was a game that offered real choice to the player, years before the branching narrative RPG became popular. And it was a game so packed with new and exciting elements to discover that some of its parts took on a near-mythical status, allowing fellow players to trade their discoveries and speculate about what might also be hidden. 20 years on, it's a game that still keeps surprising

Power Ups

Mario is famed for his power-ups, and Super Mario Bros 3 had some of the greatest ever seen in the whole series

»Mushroom
An old favourite. Transforms Mario into the larger Super Mario. Effectively acts as an extra life.

»Fire Flower
Another classic. This one grants Mario the ability to throw fireballs for a limited time.

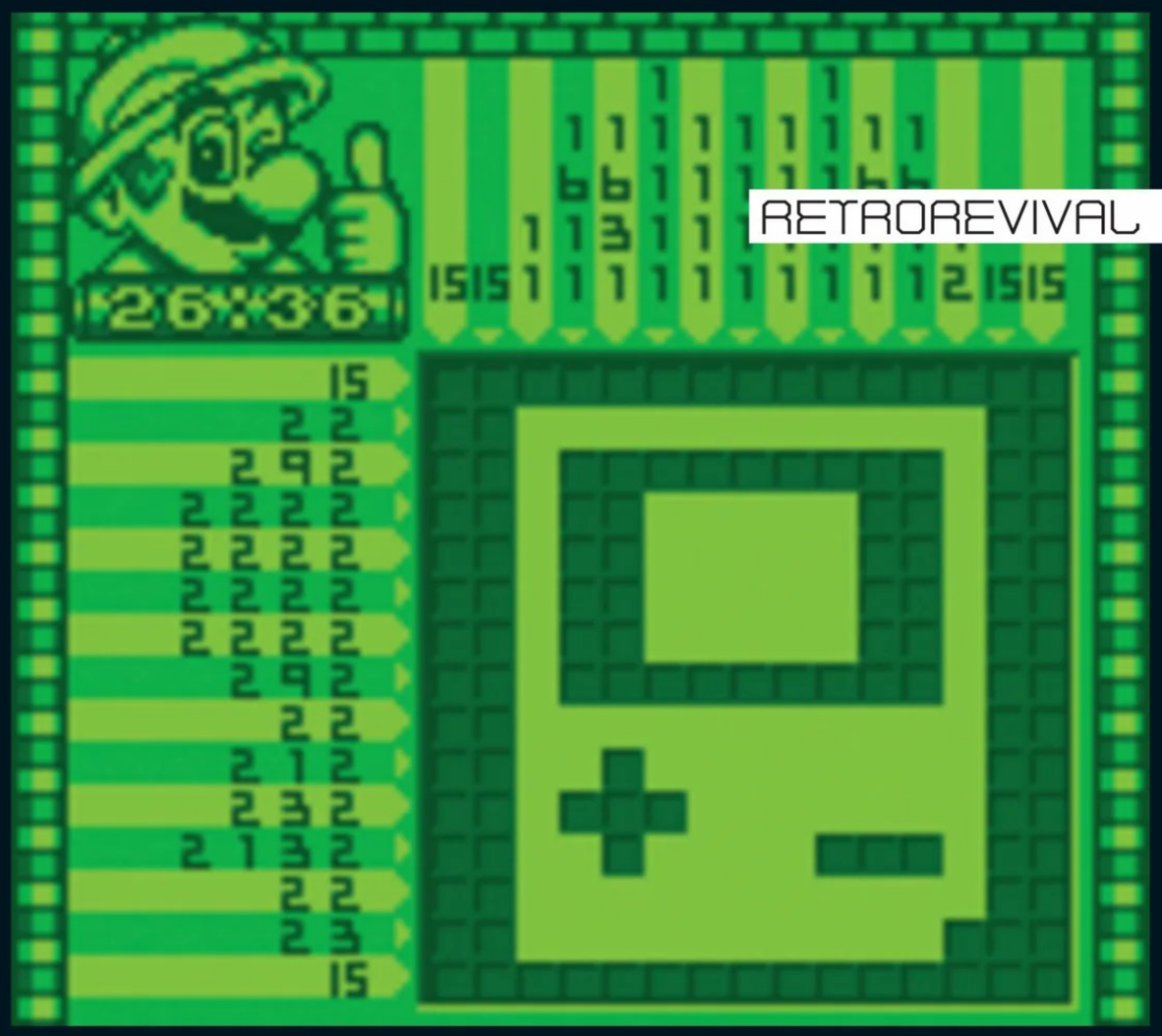
»Super Star
Makes Mario invulnerable for a short period of time.

»Frog Suit
Turns Mario into a frog, granting him exceptional hopping and swimming ability.

»Kuribo
A very rare boot that we find a Goomba hopping around in. Mario can use it like a vehicle.

»Leaf
Turns Mario into a raccoon and grants him the ability of flight.

»Hammer
Transforms Mario into a Hammer Brother, with the ability to throw hammers.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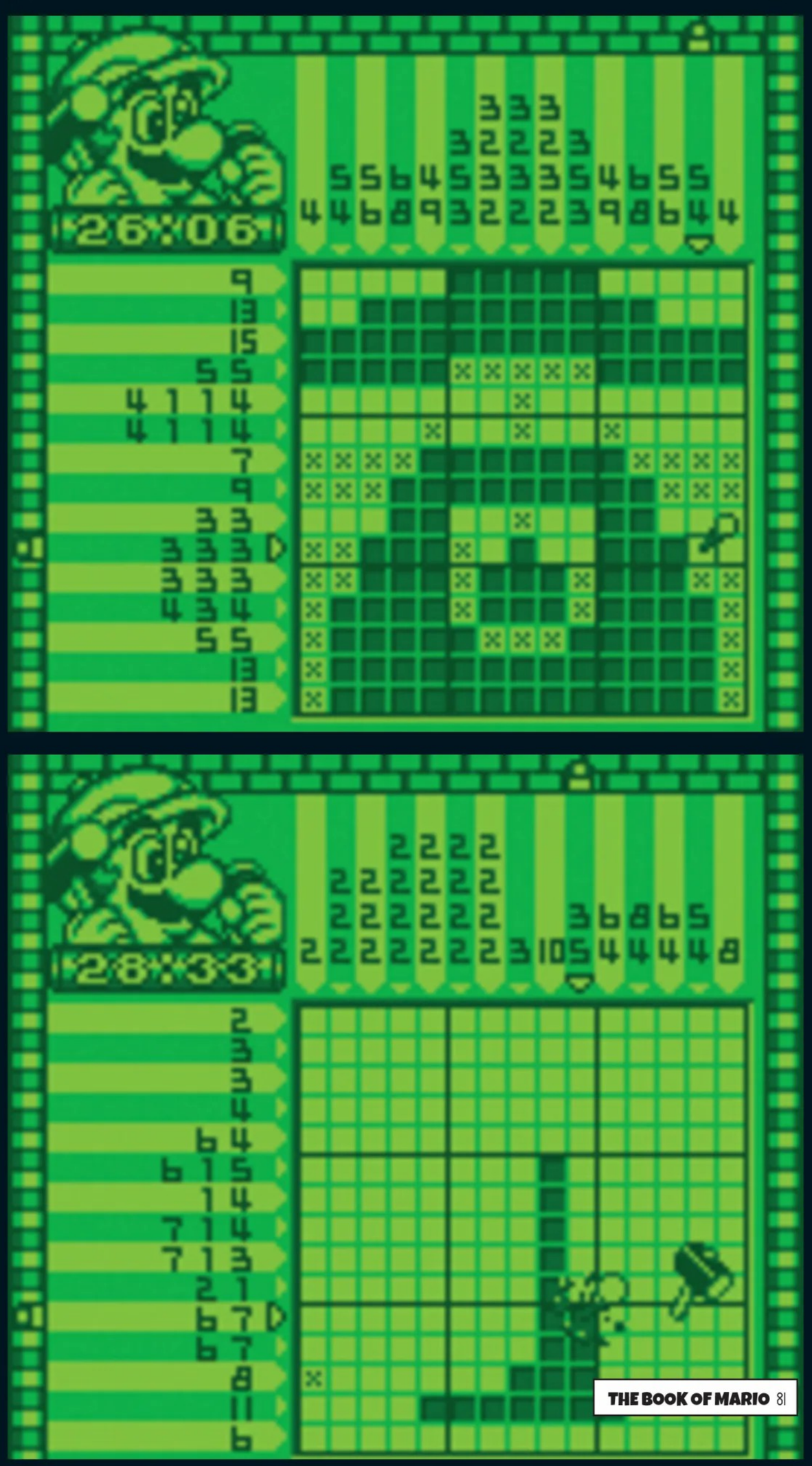
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SUPER MARIO WORLD

Nintendo's magnum opus sold over 20 million copies and launched one of the greatest consoles of all time. Nick Thorpe takes a look back at Mario's very first 16-bit platform adventure for the Super Nintendo

■ Year: 1990 ■ Platform: SNES

When Nintendo finally entered the 16-bit console race in November 1990, it was in the unfamiliar position of having to stake its claim to market leadership against real competition. The company responded in typical fashion, by launching the Super Famicom with possibly the greatest one-two punch in videogame history. The turbo-charged Mode 7 racer *F-Zero* offered plenty of substance, but its appeal hinged on style and the lure of the unfamiliar. It was Nintendo's way of demonstrating technological superiority. On the other hand, *Super Mario World* definitely looked the part, but its main function was to provide substance and familiarity (in fact, the game bore the subtitle *Super Mario Bros. 4* in Japan). With it, Nintendo intended to reaffirm its position as the world's leading developer of videogames – and it succeeded.

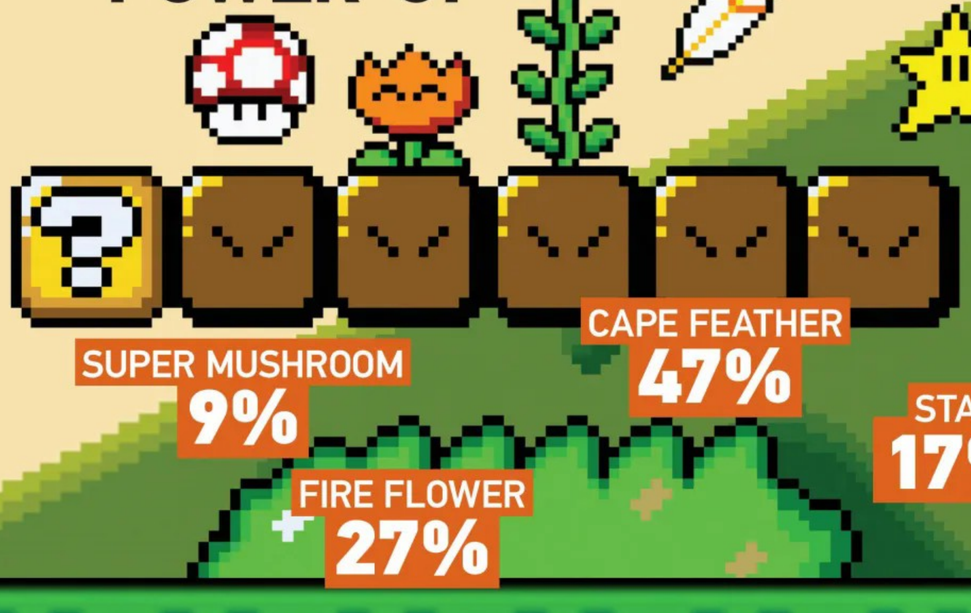
» Sumo Brothers are challenging – they'll hammer lightning downwards, setting the ground below ablaze.

To advance the game past its superb predecessors, Nintendo assigned a mixture of veteran hands and new talent to develop *Super Mario World*. Of the 15-strong team that developed the game, nine were returning from *Super Mario Bros. 3* and one had previously worked on *Super Mario Bros. 2*, while the remaining five had no prior credits and injected some fresh insight. The other major change was a new lead game director – in this case Takashi Tezuka, who had previously served alongside Shigeru Miyamoto as an assistant director and later co-director. Miyamoto himself remained on the development team, but stepped back into the less hands-on role of a producer.

As far as the basic game design is concerned, the team wisely decided not to fix what wasn't broken. The block-based level designs are familiar to anyone that has played a *Mario* game, and Mario's skills and abilities are largely drawn from *Super Mario Bros. 3*, albeit with a few tweaks. The variety of special forms was scaled back to Fire Mario and Caped Mario (a new form, but one functionally similar to Raccoon Mario), and Mario retained the ability to kick carried items but could not boot them

» This swarm of Bullet Bills is testament to the fact that there's a real challenge present.

YOUR FAVOURITE POWER-UP



PIXEL PERFECT

PARA-BOMB

SUMO BROTHER

VOLCANO LOTUS

MASK KOOPA

AMAZIN FLYIN' HAMMER BROTHER

NINJI

DINO RHINO

POKEY

CHARGIN' CHUCK

MEGA MOLE

BANZAI BILL

REX

YOSHI

KOOPA

MONTY MOLE

PIRHANA PLANT

WIGGLER

DINO-TORCH

MUNCHER

LIL SPARKY

THE SHORTEST ROAD

Do you want beat this classic, but are pressed for time? Worry not – with this guide, you'll have the game finished quick

1 Start with Yoshi's Island 2 and play normally until you reach Donut Plains 1. Once you get there, grab a cape from a Super Koopa. Use it to fly to the key near the end of the stage for a secret exit.

2 In Donut Secret 1, you'll need to find another secret exit – you can do this by finding a P Switch, then using it to turn these blocks into coins so you can retrieve the key from the Question Block.

3 Donut Secret House has a hidden boss fight – you'll need to trigger this vine, pictured above, then use a P Switch to reveal a door at the top. Beat the Big Boo and you'll gain access to Star Road.

4 Beat each Star World stage by finding its secret exit. In Star World 2, you can acquire a blue Yoshi which gains the ability to fly when its mouth is full – make sure you leave the stage with it.

5 In Star World 4, use your Yoshi to fly beneath a section of blocks to reach the exit. You can now access Bowser's Castle and beat the game, having seen just 12 of the game's 72 stages.

SWOOPERS

HOT HEAD

"Super Mario World is surprisingly economical with its resources"

like a maze built from overlapping layers of moving rock. Those ideas which are re-used, such as the new puzzle-centric Ghost House stages, are presented in ways which leave each encounter feeling distinct.

What's all the more surprising is that this level of creativity is found in the series' fourth game. Some of it can be attributed to the power of the SNES allowing the designers to do things that had previously proven impossible, and the addition of a save battery certainly enabled the enormous game world to be realised. However, credit must also go to the development team for breaking new ground when it would have been easy to just provide a slightly prettier version of what had gone before.

But *Super Mario World* was all the more special because it represented the end of an era, as the last traditional 2D *Mario* platformer to hit a home console for many a year. *Yoshi's Island* was a marked departure from the traditional Mario style, and Nintendo took its mascot into the world of 3D for his next major console game. By the time Mario's side-scrolling adventures returned in the *New Super Mario Bros.* series, traditional pixel art and chiptunes had been left behind and things never quite felt the same.

According to your votes, *Super Mario World* is the greatest game of all time. It's not hard to see why, because it comprises all the things about gaming that people love. It looks nice, sounds wonderful and is masterfully designed, offering players an experience that can be enjoyed in whichever way they prefer. If you want depth and discovery, *Super Mario World* can give you that. If you want to make your way to the end as quickly as possible through brute force, that's allowed too. It represents familiarity, as a sequel featuring one of the most recognisable characters not just in gaming, but in all of pop culture. However, as a launch game, it also represents the thrill of new things – that unforgettable rush of excitement you experienced when you saw hardware doing things you'd never thought possible, and the unbounded possibilities that presented themselves in your mind as a result. It's a game that can be – and has been – enjoyed by players of all ages, from all over the world.

Shared nostalgia is what brings us together as retro gamers, and according to you lot, no other game appeals quite so broadly. All hail Mario – the King Of Games.

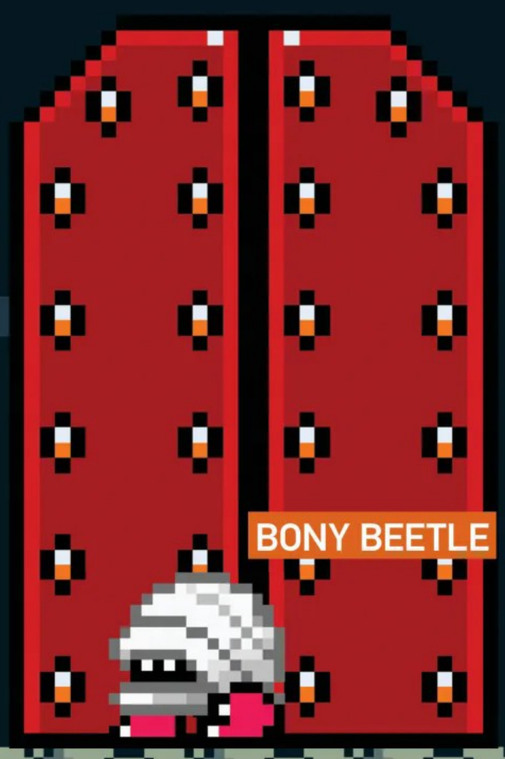
» Hanging off a dangling rope while avoiding buzzsaws is a unique thrill – it only comes up once.

» The boss themes use the same melody as the action stages, but they feel completely different.

THWIMP

BOO BUDDIES

» Ghost Houses typically offer simple obstacles but tricky navigation, requiring brainpower over quick reflexes.



BONY BEETLE

DRY BONES

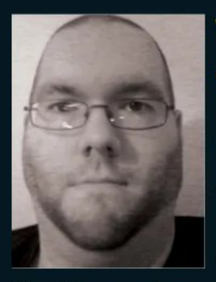
URCHIN

FISHBONES

TORPEDO TED

Q&A: ROBERT FENNELL

Known online as GreenDeathFlavor, this speedrunner shares his insight on demolishing Mario's finest game



When did you first encounter *Super Mario World*, and what did you make of it?

My first encounter with *Super Mario World* happened in 1992, when we got a Super Nintendo and my siblings and I were playing in the living room. I was a Mario kid – we had all of the *Mario* games. My best *Mario* memory is when I was first in our house to beat *Super Mario Bros.*.

What's your fastest completion time for *Super Mario World*, and how did you achieve it?

My fastest completion is in 9 minutes 47 seconds (9:47.58). I acheived that in January 2015, breaking a tie between myself and dram55 when we both had a personal best of exactly 9:48.98.

The run was done using a glitch in the game known as the 'cloud glitch'. When Mario collects a coin that Yoshi is about to eat, it gets replaced by the next available sprite, in this case, the Chargin' Chuck. Chargin' Chucks have the ability to give power-ups when eaten. In 2014, it was discovered that you can eat a Chargin' Chuck as small Mario and the game will give you a Lakitu cloud. The Lakitu cloud is useful because it can manipulate Bowser in the Bowser fight, making him stop instantly when it's moving off-screen to the left. This means you can complete the final battle up to a minute faster.

In January I finally got a solid run with a good Bowser battle which resulted in a new record which has stood for ten months now, but is beatable. The record could very well come down a full second or more with a perfect run.

Why is *Super Mario World* such a good game to speedrun?

I believe it's a good game to speedrun because it's a relatively easy game to learn. A lot of levels are beatable by just flying over them. There's also a lot of variety with this game. If you're looking for a fast easy run you can do any level. If you're looking for something a bit longer you can do no Star World. Of course, there's 96-Exit where you beat every level in the game. You could even challenge yourself with the no cape category.

What techniques are essential for any *Super Mario World* speedrunner to succeed?

You should play through the game a bit to get used to the game and its physics. Then practice every level and watch videos to learn new strategies. New runners can find videos for every level on smwwiki.com. I like to use a lot of visual and sound cues. I think it's important to find these cues for executing moves with tight input windows. When you have all the basics down you can begin to study and learn glitches if your goal is to get a fast time.

If you really get into *SMW* speedrunning and learn everything then it's all about the grind. You can't get record overnight, you need to put in a lot of attempts. When I first started I had times of over eleven minutes. It took me about a year and a half before I got world record in my category, so patience is definitely required.

BOSS RUSH

What kind of hero would Mario be if he didn't bring down a few behemoths on his travels? Here's a rogue's gallery of the miscreants he comes up against in Super Mario World

REZNOR

1 This quartet of fire-breathing triceratops stands atop a set of rotating platforms. You'll need to bump them from underneath, but watch out! Once you've knocked a couple of them from their platforms, the ground beneath you will start to give way. If you can't take out the remaining beasts, you'll need to hitch a ride on their carousel in order to finish them off. Oh, and if you were wondering, Reznor *is* named after the Nine Inch Nails frontman, Trent Reznor.

BIG BOO

2 Mario spends most of his time running away from these ghostly baddies, but the Big Boo resident in Donut Secret House is an aggressive sort. Unlike his compatriots elsewhere, he's capable of disappearing at will and is accompanied by a couple of regular Boos. You'll need to pick up Grab Blocks from below and throw them upwards at Big Boo, but they'll only hit when he turns visible. Three hits should be enough to see him off for good.

IGGY KOOPA

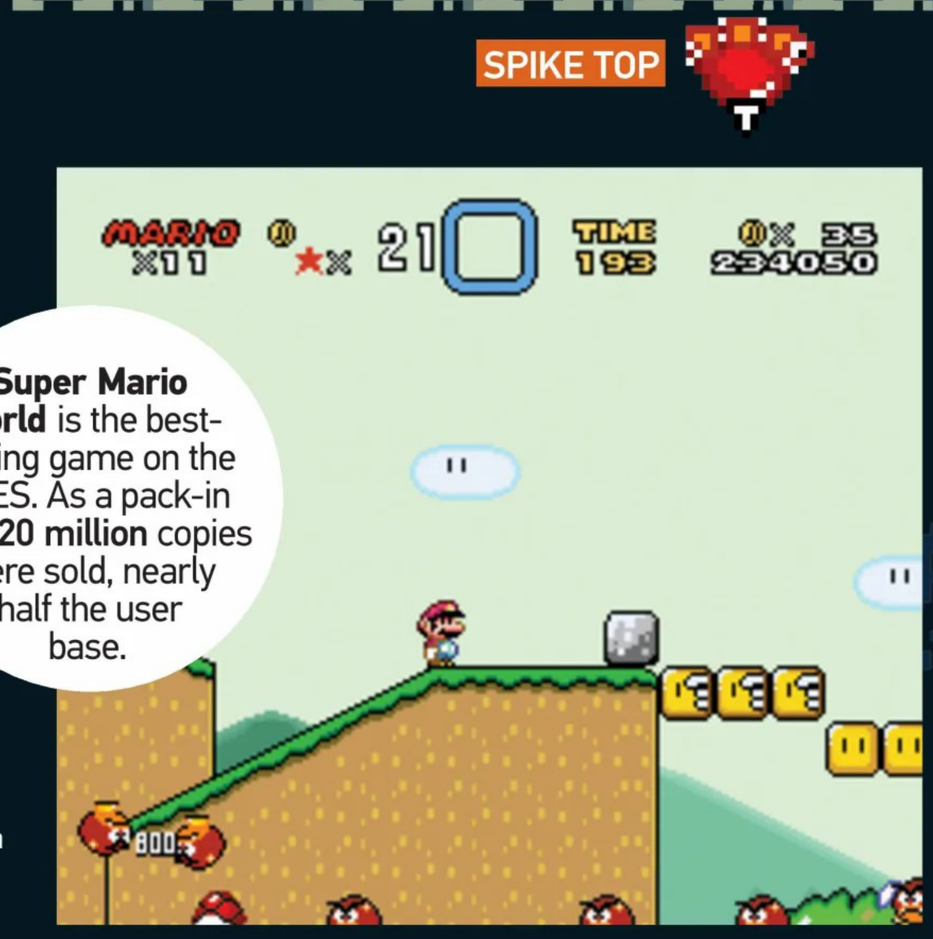
3 After battling your way through Iggy's castle, you'll encounter him atop a tilting platform, floating in a sea of lava. What follows is a deadly sumo contest, as you try to push him into the molten rock while he tries to toast you with fireballs. When you jump on him, he'll always slide downwards – so ideally, you want to time your hits for when he's close to the edge and it's tilting down. Fire Mario makes this fight a walkover, incidentally.

GAME BOY ADVANTAGE

Super Mario World only has one non-emulated conversion and Super Mario Advance 2: Super Mario World is certainly interesting…

When Nintendo chose to bring *Super Mario World* to the Game Boy Advance back in 2001, it came across with a variety of changes. The most notable of these is related to Luigi. As well as using his revised sprites from the *Super Mario All-Stars* edition of *Super Mario World*, he's got his high jump and slippery run back from previous games. Other characters have also had a graphical touch-up, and the visuals have been brightened all-round due to the lack of a backlight in the original Game Boy Advance model. While the music has all been retained, there are definite differences in sound due to the differences in sound hardware between the SNES and Game Boy Advance. However, Mario, Luigi, the Koopalings and the Boos have all gained voices. There's also a brand new intro sequence featuring Mario, Luigi and Peach.

In terms of game design, a few changes have been made – Dragon Coins have been added to stages that didn't previously feature them, and your spin jump protects you from more enemies than in the original. Once you've encountered a coloured Yoshi, you can find them in regular stages by finding an egg with certain power-ups. Additionally, if you've got the cape or fire powers, taking a hit won't send you straight back to your small form. The game can also be saved at any time. No matter which version you play, *Super Mario World* is an amazing game, but the changes may cause purists to stick to the original SNES version.



Super Mario World is the best-selling game on the SNES. As a pack-in over **20 million** copies were sold, nearly half the user base.

skyward. Other than that, the portly plumber gained a new companion in the form of Yoshi, a dinosaur that will grant him a ride and eat quite a few of the enemies that stand in his way.

The major innovation of *Super Mario World* was its structure. *Super Mario Bros.* had introduced the concept of multiple stage exits with its Warp Zones, and *Super Mario Bros. 3* had introduced a world map to the series. What *Super Mario World* did was to combine the two concepts into a non-linear experience. Whenever a stage had more than one exit, there was usually a good reason to seek that extra exit – at the very minimum it could lead to a secret stage, but it might also lead to a warp or even one of the game's Switch Palace stages. When completed, each of the four Switch Palaces activated appropriately coloured blocks throughout the game – you could tell where they were meant to be thanks to the appearance of their coloured outlines. Often they just made things a little easier by blocking off pits or providing extra platforms, but occasionally they would be crucial to making progress.

In retrospect, *Super Mario World* is surprisingly economical with its resources, given its status as a showcase game for a new console. Take the game's music as an example – Koji Kondo's soundtrack makes excellent use of theme and variation. When you first hear the overworld music, you get your first experience of a melody that persists throughout the game, forming the basis for almost every piece of action music from the underground and underwater stages to the castles and ghost houses. Likewise, while it's always visually enticing, *Super Mario World*'s wealth of levels means that it inevitably reuses backgrounds and objects frequently. What's more, the game makes sparse use of the console's advanced graphical features – where other designers might be tempted to design in such a way that highlights them, transparency and Mode 7 scaling and rotation are only deployed where they make sense in the context of the game design.

That's the real genius of *Super Mario World*, though – it is a textbook example of a design team managing to make a lot from a little, because fresh ideas are never in short supply. You can take the scenic route through the game, taking in as many stages as possible on the way to the climactic fight with Bowser, and never encounter the contempt that repetition breeds. When you encounter a tense section in which you hop between moving platforms as buzzsaws hurtle towards you, that's the only time it'll happen. Even late in the game, you'll find new ideas,

» *Super Mario World* offers visual cues – these slopes make the solution to this line of enemies obvious.

THWOMP

» Blargg is a sneaky foe, checking that you're approaching before it emerges from the lava.

» Secret exits are the key to *Super Mario World*'s long-term appeal (pun definitely intended).

» Mario's new dinosaur pal stomps enemies efficiently, but gains far more from eating them.

BUZZY BEETLE

WIZARD

PORCU-PUFFER

BLURPS

RIP VAN FISH

Mario's Picross

PICTURE-PERFECT PUZZLING

RETROREVIVAL

» GAME BOY » JUPITER/NINTENDO » 1995

Puzzle games are rarely as intense as the likes of *Tempest 2000,* but they're often pretty stressful in their own right. There's every chance you won't believe me, of course – you're doubtless thinking of those lovely opening moments of *Columns* with the soothing music and slow game speed. Don't think of that. Think about staring down an impenetrable wall of blocks in *Kurushi*, or watching helplessly as your Lemmings wander into a flamethrower. See? They lull you into a false sense of security and then deliver constant panic.

That's why I like *Mario's Picross* – it's one of the few puzzle games that is as relaxing as advertised. Instead of having to deal with additional elements and moving parts, you're given a static game board and all of the hints you need at the beginning of each puzzle. The only form of pressure applied is a generous 30 minute time limit that is reduced with each mistake you make. However, if you take the time to think through each move correctly it's unlikely that you'll make any mistakes at all. There's also a real sense of satisfaction to be derived from turning raw numerical information into a little picture of some kind (and yes, that *is* the nerdiest thing I've ever said).

So if I'm given a relaxing Sunday morning with nothing else to do, there's a good chance you'll find me in bed clutching a Game Boy and playing *Mario's Picross*. *Tetris* is just too much hassle, *man*.

MORTON KOOPA

4 Your mere presence is enough to drive Morton up the wall – literally, as he runs towards the wall and then runs straight up it and onto the ceiling. Once he's up there, you'd better keep moving as he's going to try to jump down onto you. When he lands, turn the tables on him and jump on his head. He's the game's easiest boss, and a few hits will see this him off without much of a fuss.

LUDWIG VON KOOPA

6 Hey look, it's a throwback to the original *Super Mario Bros.*! Ludwig is much like the Bowser of old, standing on the right of the screen and breathing fire at you, but now he's got a twist – a spinning backflip which makes getting behind him less of a brilliant plan than it might seem. Jump on his head a few times and you'll see him off. Incidentally, Ludwig Von Koopa boasts one of the game's few non-repeated boss templates.

ROY KOOPA

7 Roy's fight is much like the battle against Morton, but harder – the walls are closing in, making for a claustrophobic work environment. He is defeated in exactly the same way.

LEMMY KOOPA

5 Lemmy is quite happy to try to trick you rather than attack you directly, momentarily emerging from pipes while employing two decoys. The only threats here are the fireball lazily bouncing around the screen and the time limit, although the pipes make movement slightly tricky. Jump on Lemmy's head three times and you'll defeat him.

WENDY O. KOOPA

8 Wendy shares her brilliant plan with the hare-brained Lemmy, substituting the uneven pipes for a second bouncing fireball – so you face a greater threat, but with greater mobility. Jump on her head.

BOWSER

10 One of only two completely unavoidable boss fights in the game, Bowser has various angles of attack. He'll try to ram you with his flying machine, he'll drop fire on you from above, he'll roll giant metal balls at you and he'll lob Mechakoopas at you. The latter are important – to beat him, you need to immobilise them, then lob them upwards and on top of Bowser. After a couple of hits, Peach will give you a mushroom. Then rinse and repeat!

LARRY KOOPA

9 Larry has borrowed that fancy tilting platform from Iggy, and he's hooked up the lava fountain to spit up some nice deadly fireballs too. Give him a nice hot bath.

GAMES FROM THE EAST WHICH NEVER MADE IT TO UK SOIL

» This first level is trickier than it looks. The gaps in the platforms move quite quickly, and the switches at the top keep reverting to the off position.

» The trampolines in level two make for an unusual twist on the *Mario Bros* formula. Sadly there are no guns or gunmen, that's a different game...

» Dollar signs, lots of dollar signs. Collect them all before the time runs out, and then grab the ring which appears, otherwise you get nothing.

superior in terms of enjoyment, making us curious as to why Hudson felt the need to develop two contrasting versions.

Regardless, it's a fantastic oddity and of such quality it should have been re-released. The first level is a series of four screen-spanning platforms, containing gap(s) that are in constant movement. The aim is to reach the top, repeatedly hit five switches until they turn red, and then use the exit. It's tricky, but is great fun. Level two sees the platforms replaced with ten trampolines, with enemies appearing from pipes up above. Bouncing on a trampoline with an enemy defeats it, resulting in the level exit. Level three gets quite complex (the best of the four), featuring four conveyor belts, a central elevator platform, multiple enemies, and later another moving platform which must be traversed to reach the exit. The final level is a variation of the traditional bonus coin-stages, except the coins have been replaced with giant dollar signs. All need to be collected, along with a ring, for any bonus points to be awarded.

The four levels are short but sweet, capturing the Nintendo ethos of the time. Had it instead been released on the NES, no one would know any different.

SUPER MB SPECIAL

The most ambitious of the three games, and as a result the one with the most problems;

» *Mario Bros Punch Ball* is an interesting take on an old formula, and surprisingly great fun. Why has Nintendo forgotten about these old games?

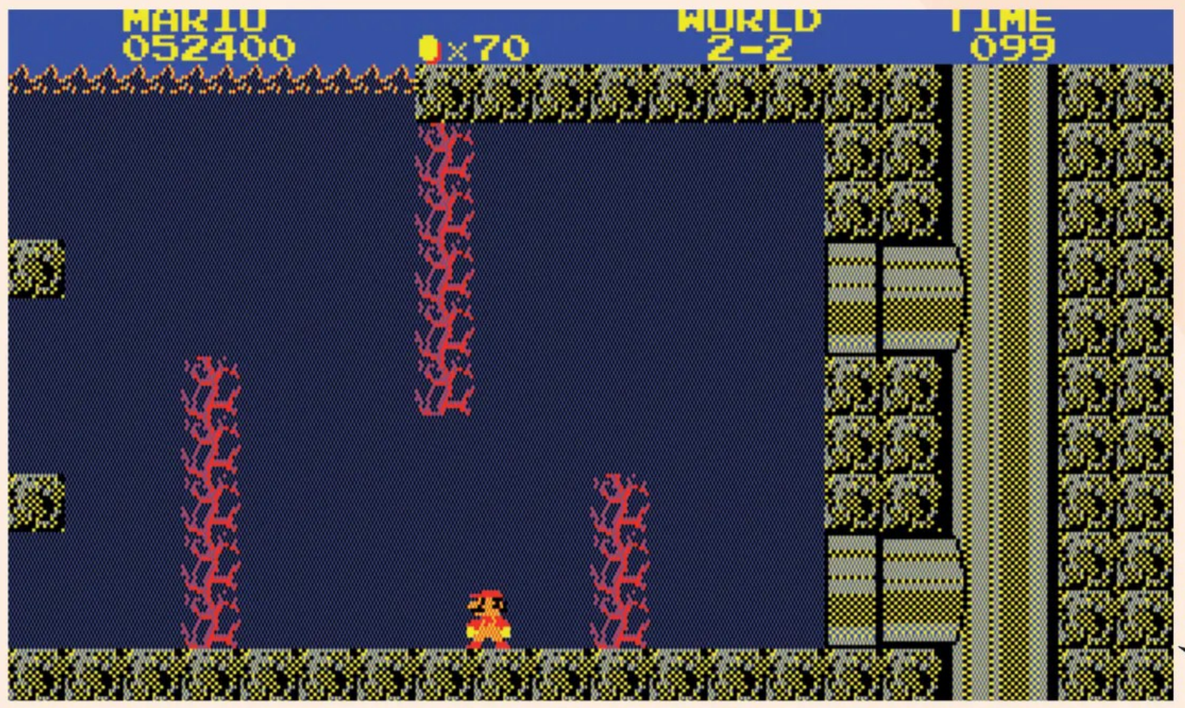
this tries to be a remake of *Super Mario Bros* on the NES, and as a result has a greater level of depth and variety than the previous two titles.

Unfortunately it's an exercise in masochism. The designers at Hudson seem intent on punishing you for playing it in the same way as the original *SMB*, which ironically means it's great for retro-enthusiasts to examine now, but would have defeated the purpose of creating such a port back in the day. It was presumably to appease or appeal to computer owners who were eager to enjoy what their console-owning friends were enjoying, so the utterly absurd and at times surreal design changes would likely have alienated anyone expecting true *Mario*.

The big difference is that the screen doesn't scroll, but instead flicks across. Annoyingly you can see part of the next area, meaning the screen flicks across before Mario reaches the edge, totally destroying any sense of timing regarding precise jumps. Worse still, turtle shells bounce back off the edge threatening to kill unsuspecting players. Then there are pipes surrounded by structures, implying a secret warp, but leading to absolutely nowhere! Meanwhile invisible coin blocks are placed at the most infuriating of places, meaning just as you launch into what appears a clear and open jumping area, said block appears and sends you hurtling down a hole – such infuriating misplacement could only have been intentional! There are also fiendish puzzles, like in world 4-3, where you need to make both sides of an elevator drop off the string they are on, to make a platform appear two screens onwards. Failure to do so makes the stage impossible to finish. While the most fascinating to read about and contemplate, because of its sheer strangeness, the limitations, high difficulty, and general glitchiness it's the least fun to play.

CONCLUSION

We want to see this trilogy released on the Virtual Console at 500 Wii points, explaining the origin of such anomalies, and making them available for everyone to play. Certainly the first two covered are worthy, perhaps even being more enjoyable than the original they were both based on. It's a pity that there are so many games like this which become lost to the mists of time. This trilogy of games certainly isn't perfect, but they are of interest to both fans of Mario and platformers in general. Here's hoping Nintendo sees sense and finally makes them available.



» YouTube user "powerfulnana" has 22 videos dedicated to PC-8801 games, with extensive *SMBS* coverage.

私を読み、私に書くことができ、私に知らせれば好みのゲームはある

遠くの稀で、エキゾチックなゲームを愛する人々のため

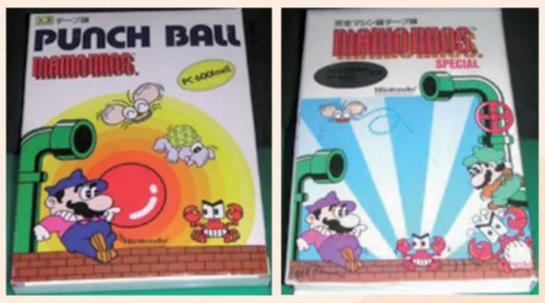
FULL OF EASTERN PROMISE

NOT ONE GAME, BUT THREE WHICH NEVER LEFT JAPAN. THE TRUE "LOST LEVELS"

HUDSON'S LOST MARIO TRILOGY

When *Super Mario All-Stars* was released in 1993, the Western world became acutely aware of a *Mario* title it was originally denied – *Super Mario Bros 2* on the Famicom Disk System. There are other games in the series that never left Japan, which few even know exist, and some of them are rather good.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

» **DEVELOPER:** HUDSON

» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NEC PC-8801

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** 3000 YEN

» **ALSO AVAILABLE FOR:** NEC'S 6001MKII AND 6601 RANGES, FUJITSU MICRO-7, SHARP X1

» **CAN'T IMPORT?** THEN WHY NOT TRY: *SUPER MARIO BROS THE LOST LEVELS*

If you're looking for a reworked version of *Mario Bros*, but can't import an ancient Japanese micro with a copy of the game, and don't feel like breaking the law via emulation, then the original *Lost Levels* on various compilations is your closest option. It's like the original *SMB*, except surreally different.

Interesting fact
The PC-8801 and other Japanese micros are home to a library of not only strange exclusives, but also baffling console and arcade ports, such as *Pac-Man*, *Ice Climber*, and *Front Line*; looking at *Front Line*'s graphics you would think a child designed it.

» Conveyor belts, elevators, moving platforms, enemies, bonus rings, and so on. Level three offers a complex situation to negotiate.

メガ駆動機構

In a change to our usual format, Poychi Robo is covering THREE Eastern Promise games this month. All of them *Mario* titles, all of them for NEC's ancient PC-8801 home computer and all developed by Hudson. They were released between 1983 and 1986, though there's never been an official explanation as to why and how Hudson acquired the licence to work Nintendo's IP – presumably Nintendo wanted to profit from the computer market in Japan, and decided to let a more experienced company deal with development. Curiously, instead of porting the original *Mario Bros.* and NES' *Super Mario Bros*, Hudson chose to remake them with gameplay changes and different levels. While the PC-8801 suffers from greater technical limitations than the NES – making the games inferior, as you're revisiting themes, albeit from a different angle – it means two decades later Hudson's forgotten trilogy plays fantastically. These three titles will make you look at the series in a different way.

MB PUNCH BALL

This is almost identical to the original *Mario Bros.*, except you can't knock enemies upside down by the hitting the platform they're standing on. The only way to defeat them is by hitting the POW block, or by throwing the Punch Ball, which Mario and Luigi carry around. The ball needs to be collected after every throw, but it gives the game an almost shooting-based quality. There are also some interesting level variations, such as one where all the platforms move left and right, making movement tricky. *MBPB* is awesome, making the original game seem new and fresh; it's baffling Nintendo has not considered re-releasing it on compilation.

MB SPECIAL

This is the odd one, coming across as a strange blend of the original arcade *Mario Bros.* and *Donkey Kong* games, featuring four levels – Hudson really went all out to make this version unique and exciting. Strangely it was released at a similar time to *Punch Ball*, though it's vastly

DIFFERENT STROKES

Mario's 3D debut was so good it launched the DS, too. But the DS version was no lazy port – it was a remake with new features...

MORE CHARACTERS

■ In addition to Mario, three extra characters – Yoshi, Wario and Luigi – were made playable, each with slight differences. Luigi's jumps are higher at the cost of handling, for instance, while Yoshi gets a unique hybrid of his *Yoshi's Island* move set and the original *Super Mario 64* one. Collecting caps mid-level lets you switch between them.

NEW ABILITIES

■ Classic *Mario 64* power-ups like the Wing Cap, Vanish Cap and Metal Cap are split among each of the characters, while new powers include mushrooms that can boost character size and damage (like the Mega Mushrooms seen later in the series) and a fire breath move for Yoshi. Several Power Stars are tied to the character-specific abilities.

EXTRA STARS

■ There are 37 additional Power Stars in the DS version, although several original ones were altered or removed for a grand total of 150. Many of the new ones are Switch Stars (which triggered by a switch and must be collected before they vanish). Collecting every Star still allows access to the castle roof via the cannon in the grounds, although Yoshi is no longer there as he's now playable.

» Rare's Gregg Mayles was the designer for both *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Banjo-Tooie*.

MULTIPLAYER & MINIGAMES

■ VS Mode lets up to four players face off in arenas in an attempt to grab as many Stars and Coins as possible within a time limit. There are also unlockable minigames, which can be earned by catching rabbits in the main game. These are largely simple distractions, all of which are designed to showcase various uses for the handheld's touchscreen.

CONTROL OPTIONS

■ Given that the DS didn't have an analogue stick, Nintendo had to get creative with its input methods here. One option is to use digital control with an extra run button, although this lacks precision. The other uses the touchscreen as a virtual analogue stick and, while tricky to get used to, this is the best of the two options once you manage to adjust to it.

IMPROVED GRAPHICS

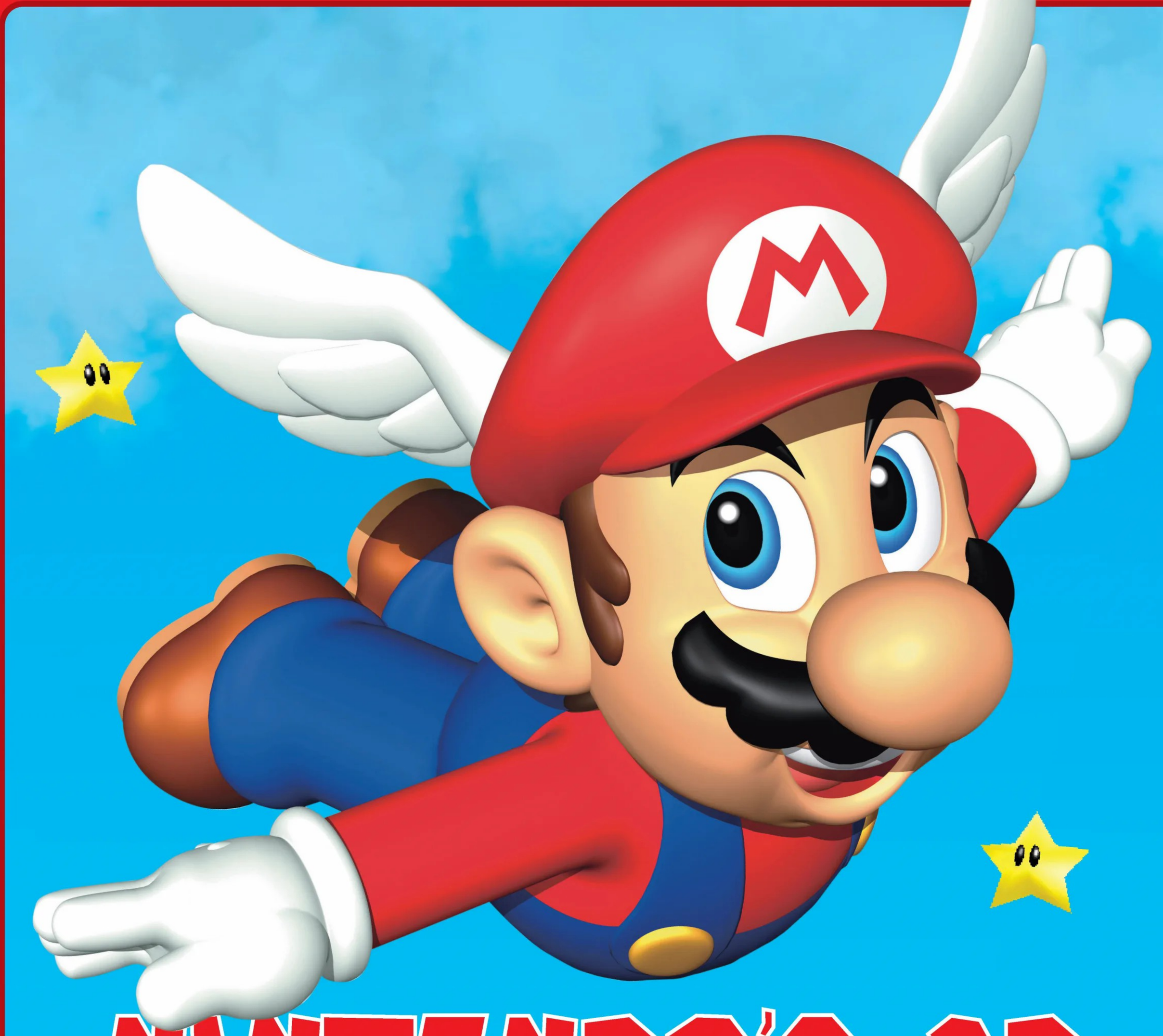
■ A combination of decent processing power and a smaller screen means that many aspects of the graphics see a marked improvement on DS – Bowser's model in particular is more in line with his modern look, while there are plenty of notable changes (most for the better) over the course of the game. The second screen is also used to display an overhead course map.

» Jumping over waves of ice is just one of the challenges in Snow Man's Land.

to do," says Gregg Mayles, a Rare developer and *Banjo-Kazooie*'s designer. "It has still not been beaten, in my honest opinion," Chris Seavor adds. "Slick, tight, great animation and totally intuitive. The first attempt at such a control type and they nailed it for the ages." In fact, he found that even the difficult aspects of controlling the portly plumber provided satisfaction. "There was a particular mechanic that took me ages to get to grips with, which involved jumping off a wall, I just couldn't do it. Then one day all my muscles suddenly twigged, and the sheer joy of jumping up and up from wall to wall, in 3D, was a revelation."

Paul's first impression of the game centred on "using the central, solitary analogue stick to help Mario perform backflips and dodge and weave around the first level of the game". It was the stick that did a lot of the work in making the game feel so good. John explains the appeal well: "The self-centring thumb stick was the first viable analogue joystick I'd come across. Analogue sticks have been around forever but they were always near-enough impossible to use. *Mario* had effortless, expressive, intuitive control of a character in a 3D world," he says. "Back then, it was more or less accepted that 3D platformers don't work. There had been a few noble attempts but they were all difficult and confusing to play. Usually the gameplay was about overcoming the controls and camera restriction," he continues. "*Mario 64* had you running, skipping, backflipping, climbing trees and even flying. Nintendo had done the impossible."

Of course, all of that excellent control would have been for nought if the game didn't provide adequate space to utilise it, and challenges to overcome. Nintendo delivered in both regards. Paul remembers the sense of disbelief in the office at the time. "The art designer of *C&VG* was asking me all these questions, because he doubted that much of what he had heard was true: 'Can I just run onto that bridge and jump into the water? And then I can swim? Under the water?'" For Gregg, the structure was as important as the space. "3D games up to this point felt restricted in where you could go and what you could do, but *Mario 64* removed these restrictions," he explains. "The freedom made the worlds a joy to explore, coupled with an progression system which allowed you to tackle challenges in the order you wanted to."



NINTENDO'S 3D GAME-CHANGER

In an age when it was said that 3D platform games didn't work, Nintendo proved us all wrong. Nick Thorpe and Luke Albigés examine the impact of the N64's most revolutionary game...

» Mario's classic animations were transferred flawlessly into 3D, like this jumping motion.

Gregg. "I also wanted our worlds to feel a lot more grounded, basing each one in believable realism that was given a fantastical and humorous twist."

"We wanted to see more visual detail," Chris Sutherland elaborates, "especially as we'd just been producing very detailed prerendered visuals with games like *Donkey Kong Country*. The challenge is to not overwhelm the player with detail – it still needs to be clear what items can be walked on, when a floor is slippy and so on. Likewise, we wanted the architecture/geometry of the worlds to be more complex and interesting – but in doing so, the camera that follows the player needs to become more complex and clever to handle unusual situations and to avoid confusing the player."

» Metal Mario: he's heavy, but pretty unlikely to try to murder John Connor.

Getting the camera right is a task that Gregg remembers vividly. "When I played *Mario 64* I didn't feel the camera was that good, but the reality of just how hard a job this is to get right become apparent when we created our own camera systems," he reminisces. "In hindsight, *Mario*'s camera had the right goals in trying to be as dynamic as possible and mostly got it right. The 3D worlds that we created were even more complex than *Mario*'s and created major headaches for us. Sadly a good camera system is invisible and something nobody talks about, but one that has even minor problems gets a lot of attention."

With Rare more accustomed to 3D game development by the time of *Conker's Bad Fur Day*,

PLUMBING THE DEPTHS

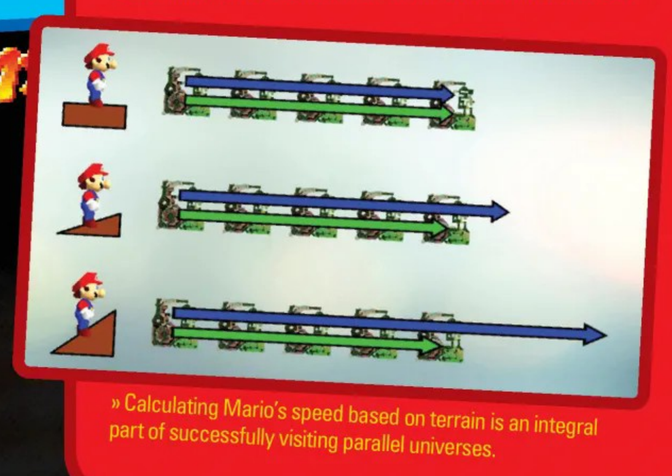
Pushing Mario 64 in ways you wouldn't believe

As one of most-played games on the speedrun circuit, *Super Mario 64* has been pushed to the limits over the 20 years since its release. Countless bugs, glitches and quirks have been discovered in that time, some of which help towards the goal of getting completion times down, while others actively go against that concept. On the former front, various skips have been found that avoid triggering instances of text or brief cutscenes, each shaving valuable seconds off times. Far more noticeable, though, are the effects of the more significant glitches, most of which involve performing a backwards long jump (or BLJ for short) or some variant thereon. These can be used to skip the Star Doors that would otherwise gate access to the Bowser encounters, as well as the 'infinite staircase' that leads to the final level and showdown, making it possible to clear the game with far fewer than the 70 Stars usually required – the minimum was thought to be one (Board Bowser's Sub in Dire, Dire Docks) for a good while until an even more complex version of the BLJ trick was found that let that stage be skipped as well, opening the door to 0-Star runs (and ironically doing so without opening the door). These tricks allow for the credits to be reached in just a little over five minutes, while various categories exist for players who would still chase world record pace without having to use said tricks to do so.

At the other end of the spectrum lies the work of YouTuber pannenkoek2012, whose channel is filled with literally hundreds of videos in which he does everything from collecting every possible coin in each level to showcasing various glitches and oddities in the game that you won't see in a more refined speedrun where they would literally only cost time. More recently, however, he has found fame for a series of videos in which he attempts to collect many of the game's Stars in as few presses of the A button as is possible. These challenge runs, while interesting, only really started to garner attention in the last year or so, with commentated versions of several videos going so deep into the science of how each run works as to turn glitch mastery into an art form. In these videos (which are incredible, it must be said), you'll see how every stage exists on a near-infinite grid of so-called 'parallel universes', which have collision but no geometry; you'll hear terms like 'QPU Alignment', 'Syncing Speed', 'Half A-Press' and 'Held Object's Last Position' used in explaining feats of extreme mechanical manipulation; you'll discover just how long Mario needs to run on the spot in certain locations to build up enough speed to perform some of these crazy glitches (spoilers: it's *12 hours*).

Many of us reflect on *Super Mario 64* as an incredible highlight of our gaming lives – an amazing introduction to 3D gaming that set the stage for much of what came after. But for others, it's an obsession. And whether that means treating it like a race or like an in-depth science experiment, the fact that players are still discovering new things about this game two decades after release is nothing short of incredible.

» *Super Mario 64* is the most popular game on speedrun.com, with over 1,000 runners across a bunch of categories.



» Calculating Mario's speed based on terrain is an integral part of successfully visiting parallel universes.

Further Reading:

speedrun.com/sm64 - The fastest runs of the game – 70-Star and 120-Star runs are pure skill exhibitions, while lower categories combine this with glitch exhibitions.

tasvideos.org/SM64TASHistory - Tool-assisted videos that show optimal routing and the evolution of glitch-led runs, from the first 16-Star run back in 2005 to the effectively perfect run recorded in 2012.

youtube.com/pannenkoek2012 - pannenkoek's YouTube channel, which goes into insane depth on just how far *Super Mario 64*'s mechanics can be twisted and broken.

» Using the analogue stick gently, Mario can tiptoe past this sleeping enemy without waking it.

There were years when I didn't play it and when I got back into retro games I worried that it might not have aged well and I was hesitant to have another go at it," Mark confesses. "But I can happily report that even now, with the novelty of the graphics having worn off, *Mario 64* is still one of the best and most fun games to play on any machine *ever*!" He's in no doubt as to why that is, too. "Nintendo didn't just rely on the graphics to wow everyone, they also concentrated on the puzzles and gameplay. So they still spent as much time on the gameplay as they had done on the previous *Mario* titles but had added in this huge world that seemingly burst out of this little bit of plastic you just stuck in the top of your machine before you turned it on."

That's why *Super Mario 64* is still as relevant today as it has ever been. The kids who grew up with N64s are adults now, and their love for the game and its successors is the reason behind the success of crowdfunding campaigns for traditional 3D platformer revivals, including *A Hat In Time* and Playtonic's *Yooka-Laylee*. *Super Mario 64*'s supreme gameplay is the reason that people are still playing today, years after most people nabbed that last Star and had a chat with Yoshi on top of the castle. People simply aren't tired of the game – and if you needed any proof of that, hop online and look at the abundance of *Super Mario 64* speedruns, challenge runs and modified versions.

But don't take our word for it. Dig out a copy of *Super Mario 64* and start up a new file. Spend a minute or two pottering around the castle to get a feel for how Mario controls before leaping into Bob-Omb Battlefield. We'd be surprised if those few minutes don't turn into hours – and years later, developers are still trying to make games that are so compelling. ★

» Most of the extended cast was absent for *Super Mario 64* – Luigi doesn't appear, and Yoshi only has a cameo.

LEAPS OF FAITH

Five games that made the jump to 3D in style...

METROID PRIME 2002

■ Many wondered how the exploration of *Metroid* could ever work in 3D, but Retro Studios came through with the perfect answer. Encapsulating *Metroid*'s sense of isolation and freedom, while being a showcase for the GameCube, it's one of the greatest examples of 2D-to-3D done right.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME 1998

■ Just as it had done with *Super Mario 64*, Nintendo embraced the third dimension when updating *Zelda* for a new generation. The game was imbued with a very real sense of verticality that helped make it absolutely jaw-dropping.

GRAND THEFT AUTO III 2001

■ Alongside *Super Mario 64* and *Ocarina Of Time*, *GTA III* was instrumental in establishing the template for modern 3D games, especially open world titles. Minimal prelaunch fanfare only made its impact all the more incredible and it had a real sense of place and personality.

FINAL FANTASY VII 1997

■ A curious case study, as the move to 3D graphics actually had little impact on the gameplay formula. It did, however, allow for impressive cutscenes and a more cinematic feel – two things that both tied in beautifully to the greater storage capacity CDs had over cartridges.

METAL GEAR SOLID 1998

■ As with *FFVII*, the polygons of *MGS* allowed for a then-unprecedented level of cinematic presentation. Kojima and his team took this concept and ran with it, too – Snake's PlayStation sneaking mission is widely accepted to be the birthplace of modern cinematic gaming.

...and five that stumbled and fell into the depths of infamy

FADE TO BLACK 1995

■ Many would argue that *Flashback* never needed a sequel, and this oddity serves as evidence for the truth of that statement. Crude 3D visuals were a far cry from the mind-blowing original, it's redeemed somewhat by its decent character animation.

BUBSY 3D 1996

■ Famously one of the worst games ever made, this took the unlikable *Sonic* rip-off, dumped him into an ugly 3D world that looked to be made out of placeholder assets and left it at that. Random deaths and horrendous pop-in abound in this abhorrent waste of time and money.

EARTHWORM JIM 3D 1999

■ Handing the reins to an untested developer for something so difficult as making the jump from 2D to full 3D doesn't sound like the best of plans, as this effort proves. Bland environments were a departure from the colourful backdrops of the original and the camera had a mind of its own.

CASTLEVANIA 64 1999

■ One of the reasons people thought *Metroid* could never work in 3D was that *Castlevania* struggled to transition. Camera once again proved to be fatally flawed in early attempts at 3D vampire hunting, at odds with the pinpoint precision for which the series was known.

PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D 1999

■ While this 3D debut wasn't as dreadful as some efforts, its poor control and awkward animations were just made to look even worse thanks to how impressive these aspects had been in the original game. The camera was also horrible – a standard pitfall of 3D gaming.

DOFFING THE CAP

A Hat In Time director Jonas Kaerlev on how Super Mario 64 inspired and influenced his crowdfunded 3D platformer

When did you first encounter *Super Mario 64*, and what impression did you get from it?
I experienced *Super Mario 64* for the first time in the late Nineties. It was the first game I played that was fully 3D, so it was really impressive at the time.

I wasn't great at English back then, since I'm not a native English speaker, so a lot of the dialogue got lost on me, but that didn't stop me from getting all 120 Stars. The presentation made it easy to fill in the gaps and imagine what the characters were saying. If I didn't know what to do because the dialogue was the only guide, I'd just explore the level until I found out what was going on – this sparked my interest in games that provide an interesting world to explore.

What were your favourite parts of *Super Mario 64*?
There are so many good parts! I think everyone remembers the piano in Big Boo's Haunt, the vertical climb up Whomp's Fortress, and plotting vengeance against the bird who took your hat in Shifting Sand Land. Peach's Castle is also one of the best parts of *Super Mario 64* – it feels so mysterious, almost like a full level in and of itself.

Which 3D platform games do you think were the best successors to *Super Mario 64*?
Super Mario Sunshine is definitely one of the best, and it's a *literal* successor to *Super Mario 64*. It stays true to the formula that *Mario 64* created, but adds more flavour to the world, making it all seem like a real, connected place. I like how the levels transform over time. It's so cool to watch Delfino Plaza get flooded with water when Corona Mountain erupts.

Psychonauts by DoubleFine is also a really great spiritual successor! It's a bit more story-based, and the levels are amazing, especially Whispering Rock and The Milkman Conspiracy. *Psychonauts* even did *Super Mario Galaxy* gravity before that was a thing!

Which elements of *Super Mario 64* have you drawn inspiration from for A Hat In Time?
Similar to *Super Mario 64*, every mission in A *Hat In Time* is centred on a Time Piece the player has to collect. A lot of the levels undergo massive changes for every new mission, to make the level feel fresh on every visit.

At first, you might be defeating the Mafia Of Cooks to collect your Time Piece, and next you're a detective in the mission 'Murder On The Owl Express'. Every new mission has a story, and you'll get to understand more about the levels and characters on every visit.

As a developer of 3D platform games, how do you seek to differentiate *A Hat In Time* from genre-defining games like *Super Mario 64*?
A Hat In Time takes a different approach to both gameplay and story. For gameplay, the player's moveset is completely different, using a double-jump and an air boost to navigate both horizontal and vertical space. The player can also change and upgrade the moveset by collecting badges and putting them on their hat. This way, we reward players for exploring with features that enrich their experience. For story, every level in *A Hat in Time* is called a Chapter. Every Chapter focuses on a single location, be it Mafia Town, Subcon Forest, or the Owl Express train. Additionally, every Chapter introduces a new cast of characters, and these characters stick with you for the entire Chapter, until you reach the Chapter finale, where things go off the rails! In Subcon Forest, you'll be signing your soul away in contracts to The Snatcher, and on the Owl Express, you'll have to choose whether the angry Conductor or the smooth DJ Grooves is your friend, or your foe.

A Hat in Time also supports multiplayer, both local and online. We took inspiration from a *Mario 64* hack, and saw a lot of potential to fully realise multiplayer for *A Hat in Time*. You can defeat bosses, collect Time Pieces and have a good time your friends.

Lastly, *A Hat in Time* has modding support. Players can create their own worlds and missions. We've seen the amazing things people can make in their favourite games, so we want to embrace that fully. The levels can be either simple to design or they can be giant worlds with multiple missions. All these features feel like a natural evolution of *Mario 64*, and we hope everyone will be enjoying *A Hat in Time* when it comes to Windows and Mac in 2017.

Placards at Shoshinkai said that the game was 50 per cent complete, and even described *Super Mario 64* as a temporary title, but that wasn't the impression that attendees took away from the event. On a visual level alone, Nintendo had already produced something stunning. "The game was shown on the show floor – looking finished and playable," says John. "And like nothing else I'd ever seen." Paul was also attending the show, and the game made a similar impression on him. "It sounds incredibly corny, but I couldn't believe my eyes. I was gobsmacked, bowled over."

That initial showing elicited strong emotional reactions from all who saw it. "I was so excited, I tried to impress the hotel staff with my bagful of press materials and transparencies," Paul confesses. "They were not impressed." According to John, other people were feeling something closer to fear, or at the least denial. "I don't know if it's true but I heard a rumour that 'Sony execs' were going around telling people that the game was running on hidden 'workstations'," he recalls. "Hard to believe now but a lot of the technical elements (MIP mapping, filtering, perspective-correct textures, z-buffering, hardware anti-aliasing) were all new to consoles and not present on PlayStation."

The version of *Super Mario 64* shown at Shoshinkai in November 1995 might not look immediately recognisable to fans – even the familiar entrance hall of the castle is different, lacking the cloud murals and even the central staircase seen in the final game – but that incredible visual polish carried over to the finished game because there was no fabrication or trickery involved. The N64 was perfectly capable of all of those features, and gave *Super Mario 64*'s worlds and characters a feeling of solidity that immediately placed both the game and console ahead of the competition.

"Everything just worked so incredibly slickly," says Andrew Oliver, then running *Glover* developer

» For the first time ever, Mario could dangle from ledges and pull himself up after a close jump.

» Chris Sutherland was responsible for *Banjo-Kazooie* and is now working on *Yooka-Laylee*.

» Unlike the main stages, boss stages were typically linear affairs with little freedom to explore.

> **"This set the benchmark – anyone releasing a 3D platformer thereafter on N64 was going to be compared with Mario by players!"**
> Chris Sutherland

Interactive Studios. "In the 'other camp', we'd been amazed by PlayStation's 3D capabilities. But, whilst Sony pushed all developers to make 3D games, many of us struggled with certain aspects. Cameras were shaky, 3D meshes showed cracks, textures warped and getting a third-person character to feel really nice and for the camera to track it well always seemed just out of reach." Nintendo's game exhibited none of those problems. "*Mario 64* was so professional, no shake, no shudder, or warping or cracking textures. The PlayStation was 32-bit with integer maths and the N64 was 64-bit with floating point maths, so there was good reason it worked so much better."

Mark R Jones, a former artist for Ocean, was similarly taken aback by the leap in 3D quality. "The graphics were jaw-dropping. I'd only really played a few 3D games on the PlayStation and this was a massive improvement," he remembers. "Round things looked round and not like a series of joined up straight lines. The colours were bright and vibrant and, despite many games claiming that playing them was 'like controlling a cartoon', I think that with this game it had really and finally happened for real. I remember everyone at school saying that *Knight Lore* on the Spectrum was like a cartoon back in 1984. But really it wasn't. *Mario* was the real thing. It had actually happened."

The press immediately set the hype train in motion. New images would appear in magazines every month, whipping anticipation up to fever pitch – but it wasn't just the public that was excited. Even developers couldn't wait to get their hands on the game. "Being a fan of the 2D *Mario* series I was fascinated by how they'd brought *Mario* into 3D, what problems they'd encountered and the approaches they took to tackling them," says Chris Sutherland of Playtonic Games. At Rare, then a Nintendo subsidiary, he served as the lead programmer on *Banjo-Kazooie*. "One might have expected the transition to 3D to have been gradual, e.g. Nintendo could have taken a traditional 2D *Mario* course and given it hints of 3D (similar to the *Donkey Kong Country Returns*) but instead they jumped in head first to give the player an immersive world to explore," he continues. "This set the benchmark – anyone releasing a 3D platformer thereafter on N64 was going to be compared with *Mario* by players!"

» These rolling balls rolled realistically around banked curves, producing lateral movement that could trip unwary players up.

» Level design was supremely clever – Wet-Dry World required manipulation of water levels to achieve your goals.

Word got around the *Killer Instinct* barn that the new *Mario* game was in the building so we all piled into Chris Tilston's room for a gander," recalls Chris Seavor, a former Rare developer who helmed *Conker's Bad Fur Day*. "I think this was before it actually released and it was the Japanese version, so nobody could understand any of the text. Needless to say it was pretty mind-blowing. I'd never seen anything like it before. Then Tim [Stamper] turned up looking rather mortified that we were all seeing this 'super secret' thing and took it away… Still, I'll never forget that moment."

Andrew's first experience with the game was equally memorable. "It was the summer of 1996 at the relatively-new E3 show in Los Angeles – Nintendo had a huge stand with around 30 N64s set up and dedicated to *Mario 64* and people queuing three deep to take turns. Most were running around outside the castle – just enjoying the experience of running Mario around a beautiful cartoon fantasy world. They nailed the feel good controls of a character running around a 3D world. Everyone was beaming – it was a turning point for the industry."

The importance of solid controls to *Super Mario 64* can't be overstated. "It was the first time I had played a game where messing around with the character's abilities was a lot of fun even with nothing specific ▶

Nintendo has always been a company that has set its own agenda, and that has rarely been more apparent than it was with the N64. Rather than following the likes of 3DO, Sega and Sony into the CD-ROM market, it stuck doggedly to cartridges. Instead of simply evolving the SNES pad, it produced a radical three-pronged controller design. Neither of those design choices proved to be the future – it's a tall order to convince an entire industry to do things differently, after all. The thing that made people take note was *Super Mario 64*, though – a bold and unique design, just like the machine it ran on. However, unlike its host hardware, it made a profound impact on the rest of the industry, shaping the development of future platform games and 3D games in general for years to come.

Of course, *Super Mario 64* had to be a bold design. The one common feature of 3D platform games released before *Super Mario 64* is that they were all distinct creations, as no two developers had the same vision of how to adapt the genre to the polygonal revolution. Exact gave us *Jumping Flash!*, a game which offered free-roaming stages, viewed from a first-person perspective. Realtime Associates delivered *Bug!*, which featured 3D stages comprised of interlocking straight paths, thus strictly regulating player movement. Xing's *Floating Runner* utilised free-roaming stages but employed a fixed perspective that made it feel almost like a top-down 2D game. Even if Nintendo had wanted to follow convention with Mario's 3D debut, there was simply no convention to follow.

The other reason that it had to be a groundbreaking game was the weight of expectation placed upon it at the time. "Up until *Mario 64*, and probably until *Mario Galaxy*, there has always been expectation surrounding a new Nintendo console and with it a new *Mario*," says Paul Davies, who was the editor of *Computer & Video Games* during the development and release of *Super Mario 64*. "So, even though we had no idea how this would shape up, the prospect of *Ultra 64 Mario* was enough to affect your breathing for a while."

Even those close to Nintendo weren't aware of what was in the works. "I was working for Software Creations at the time and they were part of the original 'Dream Team' of developers working on N64," recalls John Pickford. "I was lucky enough to be part of a group to visit the Shoshinkai 1995 show in Tokyo for the first unveiling of the Ultra 64 and its software. When we landed at the airport I remember bumping into several other British developers including the Stampers from Rare and David Jones from DMA design. David said something along the lines of, 'I hear *Mario* is looking very good.' That was the first time I had heard there was a *Mario* game in development. There had been zero publicity or even mention of *Mario* until that point."

» Later levels typically featured more floating islands, and consequently greater risk of death by plummeting.

» John Pickford was one of the early 'Dream Team' developers for the N64 and had an early glimpse of *Mario 64*.

many of those initial technical challenges were less of a problem. Still, it was a game which tried to top *Super Mario 64* in certain areas, and Chris Seavor pulls no punches in pointing them out. "The visuals… let's be honest, *Mario 64* had some ugly-looking assets in there," he notes, and it's fair to say that *Conker* came out ahead in this regard thanks to Rare's knowledge of the N64's hardware, and particularly its texturing quirks. The structure of the game was tweaked too. "We also added more of a narrative to the world, driving the player forward not so much to get the next Star, but to see where the stories and characters lead you."

Still, Gregg is under no illusions as to how difficult it was to compete with such a groundbreaking game. "*Mario 64* got so many things right that it was hard for following games to make significant improvements," he opines. "Other games had more impressive visuals, used the performance of the hardware better and created worlds that had more depth, but few got close to matching things like *Mario*'s control."

» Andrew Oliver is well aware of creating 3D platformers for the N64, having made *Glover.*

> **"Mario 64 got so many things right that it was hard for following games to make significant improvements"**
> Gregg Mayles

ver at Interactive Studios, the Glover team was discovering the same thing. "Mario set a high bar of quality to meet," says Andrew. "We were prototyping *Glover*, first on PC and then on an N64 dev kit, and we were getting great results that we were very happy with. But suddenly, we were playing a huge game that had solved a few problems more elegantly that we had. For example, it had smoothed-skinned characters, unlike the hinged, segmented 3D characters that PlayStation and *Glover* had! We decided we had to ensure our characters looked just as smooth and had to work out how to make an animated skinned character renderer." That wasn't the only innovation that Andrew and the *Glover* team had to compete with. "We just spent ages trying to work out what the logic was for the camera so we could get somewhere close," he remarks. "Technically we figured out most things, as *Glover* demonstrates, but *Mario* was still obviously a better game."

With the developers telling us how far they went to match Nintendo's effort, it's clear that *Super Mario 64* had a huge impact on videogames, so we asked them to quantify it. For John, it was a game that accelerated the pace of progress in game development. "Nintendo solved the problems of third-person control in 3D video games and presented the industry with a 'how to do it' in the form of *Mario 64*," he says. "I think the industry would have figured it out eventually without Nintendo's help but *Mario 64* saved us probably five years worth of failed experiments and clunky controls."

For Andrew, it was nothing less than proof that polygon technology was actually viable. "It made everyone realise that 3D was the future, and not just of driving games, but all games! It looked so good, and gave some personality to the characters," he says. "The worlds were big and interesting and it immersed players in a deep and beautiful fantasy world. Over on the PlayStation, it still felt that 3D was struggling and whilst technically impressive, the gameplay or graphics were generally suffering for the 3D experience. *Mario 64* showed the way forward for the whole industry!"

"It was the first of its kind and a genuine 'Wow Moment' in gaming that excited even the most jaded of people. It was a combination of revolution combined with one of the most prominent and successful series of games," says Gregg, summarising the legacy of the game. However, he also adds a important point: "It's also stood the test of time. Play *Mario 64* today and it's still got the ability to transform you into a playful child where just doing things without thought is great fun."

That's the key thing to remember about *Mario 64*. It was undoubtedly a groundbreaking and technologically-impressive game, as the developers we've spoken to have testified. Time marches on though, and other games have entered the conversation as points of reference for 3D game design. If *Super Mario 64* had just been a technical achievement, we'd remember it as an important release. But *Super Mario 64* was always a supremely enjoyable game first and foremost – and the decades that have passed since it released haven't dulled that in the slightest.

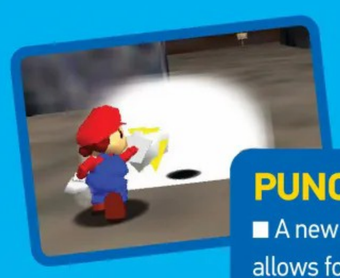
» Challenges for Stars were rather unusual compared to previous *Mario* games – this Koopa wants to race you.

MARIO'S MARVELLOUS MOVES

A closer look at the portly plumber's amazingly agile abilities

MOVEMENT (Analogue Stick)

■ Full control over Mario's movement speed is an integral aspect of the game, allowing for a degree of freedom and precision that digital control simply can't offer in 3D space.

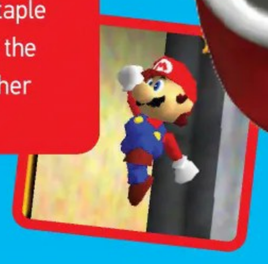


PUNCH B

■ A new addition to Mario's arsenal, this allows for more ways of interacting with the world, whether that be hitting blocks and switches or smacking enemies instead of jumping on them.

JUMP A

■ Perfect for when you don't want to be on the ground any more, Mario's staple move is as versatile as ever here – the longer you hold the button, the higher Mario will jump.



CROUCH Z

■ Where once you would just press down on the D-pad to make Mario crouch, here a bespoke button is needed. Rarely required on its own, but frequently incorporated into advanced techniques.

DOUBLE JUMP A, A

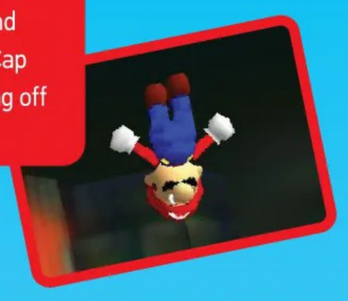
■ Time a second jump for immediately after you land from the first and you'll launch Mario slightly higher, with an audio cue to let you know you've performed this successfully.

KICK B (While jumping)

■ There's more to this move than it seems – it maintains Mario's momentum from whatever he's doing, making it a key ingredient of any speedrun rather than an offensive move.

TRIPLE JUMP A, A, A

■ A third timed leap is also possible, this time giving a much more obvious and useful height boost. With the Wing Cap on, this move will send Mario soaring off into the sky.



DIVE B (While moving)

■ Casual players might not like this move on account of how often it comes out instead of the punch while moving, but experts swear by it for grabbing objects without losing too much momentum.

BACKFLIP Z + A

■ Similar to the direction-changing somersault, only performed from a static crouch. Given Mario's general mobility, the somersault is generally considered to be more useful.

SWEEP KICK Z + B

■ Useful for making Mario perform extremely brief breakdancing displays, but not a lot more, sadly. Still, variety is never a bad thing, so bust a move from time to time!

LONG JUMP Z + A (While running)

■ Timing is key to mastering this long-range leap – press and hold Z while running to crouch-slide and quickly press A to send Mario flying. Bold use of this can skip many obstacles and hazards.

CLING (Land near platform edge or slowly walk off ledge)

■ Mario no longer has to fear death from slightly misjudging distance. Fall just short of a ledge and you'll grab the edge and can pull yourself up, sacrificing speed for safety.

SOMERSAULT (Analogue stick away from direction of running) + A

■ Jerk the stick away from the direction of travel and jump to perform a flip that goes much higher than a regular jump – great for quickly getting a vertical boost.

SLIDE KICK Z + B (While running)

■ Performed in the same manner as the long jump, only with B instead of A. This will earn you extra style points, but it's far from an essential part of Mario's repertoire.

WALL JUMP (Jump at wall, analogue stick away) + A

■ After launching himself directly into a wall, Mario can kick off it to change direction and gain height. Timing and execution are tricky, but mastery allows for some amazing shortcuts.

"With Super Mario 64 being the first of its kind, that became the de facto place to look for inspiration to solutions"

Chris Sutherland

» Chris Seavor was the brains behind *Conker's Bad Fur Day*.

» The camera would intelligently move to positions, likely to provide a helpful perspective.

Instead of the simple 'reach-the-goal' gameplay of 2D platform games, each course in *Super Mario 64* offered a selection of challenges, each of which awarded a Star upon completion. They could range from simply locating red coins to defeating bosses, winning races or just difficult platform challenges. Even Peach's Castle, the hub through which every other level was accessed, held Stars to find. Naturally, every player had their favourite moments. "Cool Cool Mountain was a favourite," says Gregg. "The way the slide race connected the top of the level to the bottom was really clever and Mario getting stuck head first in snow after a long fall was pure, indulgent charm."

"My memory is really fuzzy, but when I try to recall anything it's like looking at my happier moments of childhood," says Paul as he recounts some personal highlights. "Swinging Bowser by the tail. Finding that bottle underwater somewhere and being convinced that it held a door to a secret zone or something. We thought there would be treats hidden everywhere, and usually there was. Chasing the rabbit, because it was running away so may as well, and being led to something special." Mark found himself astounded by the longevity of the game. "Even later on, after you'd been playing the game for hours, there were new things to see," he remembers, "like when Mario turned into liquid metal. You then have this completely metal Mario, like the baddy from *Terminator 2*."

As soon as *Super Mario 64* became available in Japan on 23 June 1996, it began to receive rave reviews from the press. The list of accolades could run for pages, so we'll cut it down – 97% from *GamesMaster*, 96% from *N64* and *Total 64*, 95% in *64 Magazine*. For the first time ever, *Edge* awarded its highest score of 10. Paul Davies called it "the best console game ever" in *Computer & Video Games* and he wasn't alone in making that claim, as *Maximum* concurred in its final issue. Enormous sales success accompanied the critical acclaim, with over 11 million copies making their way to players.

While *Super Mario 64* served as a source of boundless joy for players, it served as an enormous kick in the rear for developers of other 3D games – Nintendo was way out in front and everyone else was playing catch-up. "Every developer studied that game. Even more than ten years later it was quite common to see programmers boot up *Mario 64* to see how some aspect of the controls or camera systems worked," says John. "I'd say the first result of that was *Tomb Raider* which clearly benefited from that Shoshinkai 95 showing – particularly with the swimming controls."

Mark has a similar take on the game's influence. "It did definitely pave the way for the next generation of 3D platformers. Later games like *Banjo Kazooie* and *Donkey Kong 64*, two of my most favourite N64 titles, wouldn't have been as good had *Mario* not been as well put together," he remarks. "You can just see the programmers at Rare having *Super Mario* set up next to their stations looking at it and saying, 'Right, now we have to do *that* bit better.' And in a lot of cases, they did. But Mario showed the way forward."

Mark is dead on the money – the developers at Rare were definitely influenced by the work of what was then their parent company when creating those games. "At the time we [were] experimenting with a '2.5D' look for a platform game that felt like an evolution of the *Donkey Kong Country* games we had created, but after seeing *Mario 64* we knew fully-3D worlds were going to be the future," Gregg confirms. "In the past if we've looked to solve a problem we'd often look to see how other games have tackled similar issues," Chris Sutherland says. "With *Super Mario 64* being the first of its kind, that became the de facto place to look for inspiration to solutions when we started building 3D platformers on N64."

However, there were definitely areas in which the *Banjo-Kazooie* team looked to improve upon the *Super Mario 64* experience, and they put a lot of effort into distinguishing their game from Nintendo's classic. "We wanted to ensure *Banjo-Kazooie* had the Rare feel. I wanted Banjo the bear to have a very solid and predictable feel to his control, as opposed to the higher level of skill required to master the inertia that sometimes made *Mario*'s control challenging," notes

» If the camera ever proved unhelpful, you could even utilise a Mario's-perspective camera view.

MAR

MASTER OF SPIN-

MARIO SLAM BASKETBALL

DS, 2006

■ Square Enix developed this spin-off, which features a bizarre scoring system – 20 points for a regular basket, 30 points for what would normally be a 3-point shot, and 40 points for a special shot from anywhere, plus points for coins. This isn't a bad game, but the control system is fully driven by the stylus, with no traditional button alternative – not a decision to everyone's tastes.

MARIO & SONIC AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES

WII/DS, 2007

■ Mario teams up with his old Sega rival in a crossover that Nineties kids literally dreamed of, and they choose to do a multi-sport Olympic Games tie-in? It sounds like a mad idea, but it sold in absurd quantities. Ultimately, we can see why. Mario and Sonic competing at the 100 metre dash? Bowser versus Amy Rose in table tennis? Eggman trampolining? All very real possibilities. It's a good game within the genre, and an example of motion controls complementing a game. Sequels followed until the Rio games in 2016.

MARIO & SONIC AT THE OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES

WII/DS, 2009

■ Mario and his old rival once again get into the Olympic spirit, only now with considerably more sliding involved. This time around, the additional 'Dream Event' roster is much larger and covers decidedly non-sporting events such as snowball fighting, which makes for great fun even if it's not officially sanctioned.

MARIO SPORTS MIX

WII, 2010

■ This game collects four sports that don't have their own mainline series – basketball, volleyball, hockey and dodgeball. Square Enix handled development duties, returning from its previous basketball outing, but delivered a game that received mediocre scores from the critics. Most of these games haven't been seen in Mario form since.

MARIO GOLF WORLD TOUR

3DS, 2014

■ The most recent Mario Golf game fully embraces what makes Mario sports games fun, with a crazy power-up enabled mode joining the more standard (if still decidedly arcadey) main game. We particularly like hitting a shot such that it enters a pipe, only to be forcefully ejected out!

MARIO TENNIS: ULTRA SMASH

WII U, 2015

■ Despite the presence of ice courts, mega mushrooms and everyone's favourite character Daisy, the Wii U entry in the Mario Tennis series failed to live up to expectations, as the solid fundamentals were let down by a lack of game modes.

MARIO SPORTS SUPERSTARS

3DS, 2017

■ Co-developed by Bandai Namco and Camelot, this game compiles the existing tennis, golf, baseball and football gameplay developed previously, and adds some horse racing for good measure. This jack of all trades mastered none and received average reviews as a result.

THE REST...

Mario Golf (1999) | **Mario Tennis** (2000) | **Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour** (2003) | **Mario Golf: Advance Tour** (2004)
Mario Power Tennis (2004) | **Mario Tennis: Power Tour** (2005) | **Mario Strikers Charged** (2007)
Mario Super Sluggers (2008) | **Mario & Sonic At The London 2012 Olympic Games** (2011)
Mario Tennis Open (2012) | **Mario & Sonic At The Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games** (2013)
Mario & Sonic At The Rio 2016 Olympic Games (2016) | **Mario Tennis Aces** (2018)
Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 (2019) | **Mario Golf: Super Rush** (2021)
Mario Strikers: Battle League (2022)

MARIO PARTY GAMES

MARIO PARTY

N64, 1998

■ When Nintendo first unleashed this Hudson Soft-developed spin-off upon N64 owners, nobody could have known that it would become Mario's most prolific spin-off series. The game takes place on a board which characters travel around after rolling dice. The goal is to accumulate stars, with the player who has the most at the end of the game declared victorious. Between turns, minigames are played for coins to use during turns – and with 53 available, it'll take a while before you tire of them.

Unfortunately for Nintendo, the game design here resulted in a class action lawsuit in the USA. Some minigames required players to rotate the N64's analogue thumbstick quickly, and players took to using their palms, ending up blistered and sore as a result. The company was forced to provide protective gloves to anyone that had purchased the game. Unsurprisingly, such mini-games were dropped from future Mario Party games.

MARIO PARTY 2

N64, 1999

■ This sequel had two big ideas: firstly, remove anything that might get Nintendo sued by its consumers. Secondly, add items for an extra wrinkle in the gameplay. Items can be bought, won or stolen and have a range of effects when used on the board. For example, the mushroom and golden mushroom give you extra dice rolls per turn, while the Bowser Suit allows you to bully some coins out of any player you pass on the board. These were a welcome introduction to the series, and have become as much a staple of it as the minigames.

MARIO PARTY 4

GAMECUBE, 2002

■ The first 'next-gen' Mario Party game included a lot of new stuff, including six new 3D boards and the Extra Room, in which Whomp and Thwomp provide new spins on existing minigames. The trade-off is that the game has the fewest minigames since the original, although the power of the GameCube does allow it to look rather lovely by the standards of the day. Despite the aggressive pushing of the series threatening to fatigue consumers, the move to the new platform helped considerably with sales – where *Mario Party 3* only broke a million copies, *Mario Party 4* did rather better with over 2 million copies sold.

MARIO KART DOUBLE DASH!!

GAMECUBE, 2003

■ This oddball entry in the series introduced a dual-driver gimmick, which didn't last beyond its introduction. It also gave drivers their own signature items, and let them pick between different karts. The track design remained of high quality though, making this a less divisive game than it could otherwise have been.

MARIO KART DS

DS, 2005

■ A selection of great new 3D courses was given equal billing with a group of retro tracks for the first time ever in Mario Kart's second handheld outing. Stand-out new tracks include Tick Tock Clock, Waluigi Pinball and Airship Fortress. This was the first Mario Kart game to introduce online play, allowing gamers worldwide to connect with each other – only to bemoan their status as blue shell magnets.

MARIO KART WII

WII, 2008

■ This entry in the series is the best-selling one of the lot, but it can be a little bit divisive. The tracks are wide to accommodate the expanded field of 12 racers, lots of crazy new power-ups have been added, and the game marks the debut of motorbikes as a playable vehicle type. Additionally, the emphasis on drifting for speed boosts has been reduced. It's still a hoot in multiplayer, but unlocking everything can be a bit of a chore.

MARIO KART 7

3DS, 2011

■ The third handheld Mario Kart makes some interesting changes to the formula, thanks in part to new co-developer Retro Studios. The racing now cuts across land, air and sea as karts have gained the ability to glide and even drive underwater – and even the retro courses have been rebuilt with these abilities in mind. You're also expected to build your kart from a few components, each affecting a number of key stats including speed, acceleration, weight and grip.

MARIO KART 8

WII U, 2014

■ New anti-gravity vehicles allowed *Mario Kart 8* to include twisting, looping tracks of a kind more closely associated with *F-Zero*. It was also the first game in the series to support DLC, which featured a range of classic Nintendo properties including *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Excitebike* and – yes – *F-Zero*. Unfortunately, the Battle Mode was a little bit underwhelming, but that didn't stop it becoming the best-selling Wii U game ever, bought by over 50 per cent of console owners.

MARIO KART 8 DELUXE

SWITCH, 2017

■ The most recent Mario Kart game is an enhanced version of *Mario Kart 8*, featuring all of the Wii U version's DLC content and everything unlocked by default. There are also new racers including the Inklings from *Splatoon*, and the classic Battle Mode returns with five different rule sets. It's already one of the best-selling games for the Switch, no doubt due to how well it fits with the system's pop-up multiplayer ethos.

THE REST...

Mario Kart Arcade GP (2005)
Mario Kart Arcade GP 2 (2007)
Mario Kart Arcade GP DX (2013)
Mario Kart Arcade GP VR (2017)
Mario Kart Tour (2019)

10 SPIN-OFFS

That Mario sure is a talented scamp. His day job as a plumber might be relatively unremarkable, but besides that and being a hero to the Mushroom Kingdom, he's a whole lot more. Over the years, Mario has been a champion racing driver, a tennis ace, a golf professional, a party animal, a typing tutor and much more. He's even been a doctor, though his habit of throwing pills at the problem suggests that he might be single-handedly responsible for the threat of antibiotic resistance.

What's remarkable is that Mario's versatility is more than a gimmick – while other gaming stars struggle to establish one meaningful spin-off, Mario's many spin-offs often live up to the quality of his main platform adventures. Some of them even spawned very successful franchises in their own right. With that in mind, let's take a look at Mario's non-platforming outings from start to finish.

EDUCATIONAL GAMES

MARIO TEACHES TYPING

PC, 1991

■ This one is a pretty simple affair – the idea is that you press keys on your keyboard, and Mario does his thing until such time as you do it wrong or do it too slowly. Additionally, the program shows you correct form, so you know which finger you're supposed to be using for any particular key. You'll be hopping on Koopas in one lesson and dodging Thwomps in the next. Bizarrely, this appears to be the first game in which Mario is heard to speak. Who'd have thought?

MARIO IS MISSING!

PC/SNES/NES, 1992

■ So here's something interesting – a starring role for Luigi, as his brother has been kidnapped. In order to enact a rescue of his beloved sibling, he'll need to defeat Bowser by... learning about the world's great cities? This doesn't quite make sense. Annoyingly, this game sets a trend amongst the educational Mario games – using *Super Mario World*'s look and music, but failing to do so correctly. Given that these were officially licensed games, you'd think Nintendo would give the poor old developers the source assets they needed!

MARIO'S TIME MACHINE

PC/SNES/NES, 1993

■ That dastardly Bowser has gone and travelled through time to steal a variety of historical artifacts. Why? To create his own private museum, of course. Unfortunately, this act will change the course of history in untold ways, so Mario decides to go back in time and return the exhibits to their rightful owners. The time travel is achieved through a rather neat Mode 7 section in which you're tasked with collecting mushrooms, adding a slight bit of excitement before the game settles into *Mario Is Missing!*-style drudgery.

MARIO'S EARLY YEARS! PRESCHOOL FUN

PC/SNES, 1994

■ This odd little game consists of a variety of activities, such as comparing opposites and hearing sounds. You point at a cow, press the button, it says "moo" – scintillating stuff, wouldn't you agree? In a neat touch, the instructions are conveyed via speech rather than text, as the designers clearly realised that most of the game's target audience would not be able to read. It's not a lot of fun for anyone above the age of five, but then it's not exactly meant for you anyway, is it?

THE REST...

I Am A Teacher: Super Mario Sweater (1986) | **Mario's Early Years: Fun With Letters** (1993)
Mario's Early Years: Fun With Numbers (1994) | **Mario Teaches Typing 2** (1996)

MARIO KART GAMES

SUPER MARIO KART

SNES, 1992

■ Was *Super Mario Kart* meant to be a Mario game? No – originally, Nintendo was trying to make a multiplayer *F-Zero* game. Still, what it came up with was nothing short of sublime. At the time, the pseudo-3D Mode 7 tracks were state of the art, but there was much more to the game's appeal than a flashy graphical technique.

So much of what makes Mario Kart games great was established right here at the start of the series. Most of the weapons have become mainstays, from the shells and bananas to the invincibility star. The little hop when you hit a shoulder button to slide is in there too, and the traditional super-tough Rainbow Road finale is right there. In fact, some purists will tell you that this game is the best in the series and everything else is unnecessary fluff – and sometimes, they can be pretty convincing.

MARIO KART 64

N64, 1996

■ The first Mario Kart sequel was in full 3D, which enabled a design revolution – suddenly, big hills and crazy jumps became common track features. This gave rise to some incredibly atmospheric tracks like Bowser's Castle, but also allowed for some of the scummiest behaviour in Mario Kart history. If you've ever used the Rainbow Road shortcut or lightning bolted your friends during the Wario Stadium jump, you'll know what we mean. The N64's four control ports made multiplayer races even more frantic, and the new leader-seeking blue shell item would become an iconic (and divisive) part of the series for good.

MARIO'S KART: SUPER CIRCUIT

GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2001

■ Nintendo's new handheld needed something to show off its power, and just as Mode 7 tracks had wowed console gamers a decade prior on the SNES, they impressed Game Boy Advance players in *Mario Kart Super Circuit*. Rather than simply converting the SNES classic, Nintendo created a whole new game with improved visuals and an original set of tracks. There were few other new features, but they would have been surplus to requirements. The best mode here was single-cartridge link play – with just one copy of the game, a group of players could get in on the fun.

MARIO PARTY 6

GAMECUBE, 2004

■ As well as being the first game in the series to push past the 80 minigame mark, *Mario Party 6* is notable for its introduction of minigames using the bundled GameCube microphone peripheral – a gimmick that would carry over to its sequel the next year.

MARIO PARTY ADVANCE

GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2005

■ We're as surprised as anyone that it took Nintendo so very long to bring such a clearly popular franchise across to its handheld platform. Due to the power of the platform, designers were not able to use 3D visuals, which worked to the detriment of the minigames included. Luckily, with the Game Boy Advance already on the way out thanks to the DS by this point, that wouldn't be a problem down the line.

MARIO PARTY 8

WII, 2007

■ The Wii's appeal to casual gamers was the perfect vehicle to sell more copies of *Mario Party* – and indeed, *Mario Party 8* sold a massive 7.6 million copies. Perhaps unsurprisingly, motion controls made their debut in the series with this entry, and would remain a fixture of the series during the Wii era. That control method did cause some problems with a later game, though...

MARIO PARTY: DS

DS, 2007

■ Would you be surprised to learn that quite a few of the minigames here used a new control method, and that the control method in question was stylus-driven touchscreen play? We thought not – by this point, you should be used to Nintendo trying new gimmicks with Mario Party games. Did it work? Well, over 8 million copies of the game were sold, which is a number that anyone would envy.

MARIO PARTY: THE TOP 100

3DS, 2017

■ The most recent release in the Mario Party series is a nostalgia-driven one, as it compiles 100 favourite minigames from *Mario Party* to *Mario Party 10*. With all the various gimmicks employed over the years, this required some tweaks to previous games which purists may not love. There's only a single board map here, but Minigame Island mode provides you with another challenge – and one that's required to unlock 24 of the games for use in the main mode.

MARIO PARTY 10

WII U, 2015

■ The only Wii U entry in the Mario Party series adopts the gameplay style of its Wii predecessor, with all players travelling the board together in a car rather than venturing alone. However, a mode resembling earlier Mario Party games was included for owners of Amiibo figurines, and an interesting new one-versus-many Bowser Party mode is also present. In this mode, four players share the TV and a goal of escaping from Bowser with their hearts intact. Meanwhile, your designated Bowser plays on the Wii U GamePad and activates traps to stop them, in a fun little wrinkle to the formula.

THE REST...

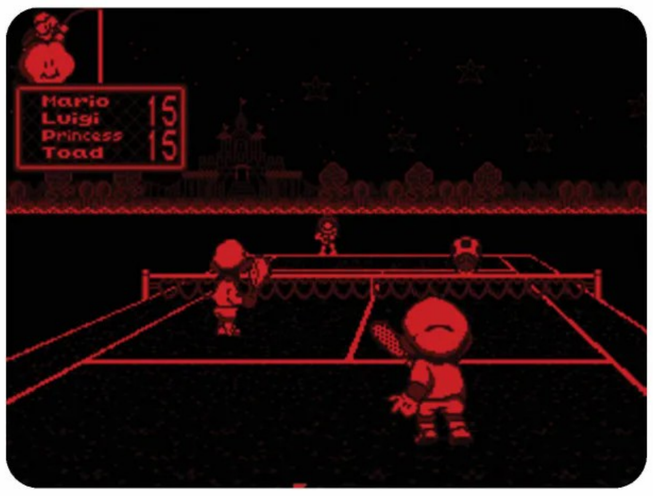
Mario Party 3 (2000) | **Mario Party 5** (2003) | **Mario Party-e** (2003) | **Mario Party 7** (2005) **Mario Party 9** (2012) | **Mario Party: Island Tour** (2013) | **Mario Party: Star Rush** (2016) **Super Mario Party**(2018) | **Mario Party Superstars** (2021)

NES OPEN TOURNAMENT GOLF

NES, 1991

■ Unlike most Mario spin-offs, *NES Open Tournament Golf* doesn't feature our hero's name in the title – but with the man himself featured prominently on the box art, Luigi as the second player and Toad and Peach making guest appearances as caddies, this is most definitely a Mario spin-off.

Mario sports games are typically known for being outlandish, arcade-style affairs which prioritise multiplayer fun and crazy power-ups over realism. *NES Open Tournament Golf* doesn't follow that formula, and is actually a golf game by the book. What's unusual about the game is the massive content disparity between the Japanese and export versions – the international release is significantly easier than what Nintendo served to its domestic audience. This wasn't a bad start for Mario on the links, but further games would develop on the concept of what golf might look like in the Mushroom Kingdom, starting with 1999's *Mario Golf*.



MARIO'S TENNIS

VIRTUAL BOY, 1995

■ Much like *NES Open Tournament Golf*, *Mario's Tennis* serves as an early precursor to a sub-series that would develop a much more distinct identity of its own. *Mario's Tennis* is a fairly straightforward game featuring almost all of the characters from *Super Mario Kart*, using a low camera angle that's only viable because of the Virtual Boy's simulation of depth. Unfortunately, the key appeal of Mario sports spin-offs is often their multiplayer modes, and *Mario's Tennis* doesn't have one because the Virtual Boy never had an official way to play multiplayer games.

MARIO SUPERSTAR BASEBALL

GAMECUBE, 2005

■ After years of success with golf and tennis, Mario started to move into new sports towards the end of the GameCube era. This take on baseball sees Mario and friends bring their Star Skills, power-up items can be bought from a shop, and stadiums even have their own hazards such as Piranha Plants that can send the ball in all kinds of crazy directions. The game also has a variety of minigames to keep things spicy if you get bored of regular baseball. Reviews were moderately positive, with the average score falling roughly between *Edge*'s 6/10 and *Nintendo Power*'s 9/10.

SUPER MARIO STRIKERS

GAMECUBE, 2005

■ If you've ever longed to see football without a referee and haven't yet discovered the joys of certain non-league organisations, *Super Mario Strikers* is the game for you. Without fouls, you can rough up the opposition a bit; without drug testing, power-ups can give you an unfair advantage. Of course, we haven't even touched on the 'super shot' that counts for two goals instead of one, or the fact that games can't end in a draw. *Nintendo Power* gave the game 7.5/10 when they reviewed it, and that reflects the critical consensus on this game well.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins

» **PLATFORM:** GAME BOY » **RELEASED:** 1992
» **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO

There was always something different about *Super Mario Land*. Sure, it was inspired by the classic *Super Mario Bros* games for the NES, but it had its own identity – after all, the home console games never had shoot-'em-up sections or worlds inspired by ancient Egyptian culture. So when the sequel came around, we were hoping for something that was similarly out of the ordinary.

We shouldn't have worried. After being swallowed by a giant turtle on the world map, we found Mario travelling through a boat and eventually a whale. Yes, that's right – *through* a whale. Its squishy guts aren't a problem for our intrepid adventurer, but he does need to stay away from the sharp ribs while he avoids Koopas and skeletal fish. We get the latter, but why are the former there? Then again, why is Mario there? It's a mystery, but thankfully it's a mystery that gives *Super Mario Land 2* something to set itself apart from the rest of the series.

BIO

"Why did the hedgehog cross the road? To get to *Super Mario Land 2*." Nintendo might not have had the jokes, as this advertising slogan shows, but the game design that made the previous Mario games so appealing was present in spades. Players could make their own way through a map full of stages in order to recover the six golden coins stolen by the nefarious Wario, who made his debut in this game. This would ultimately lead to the new *Wario Land* series, with the *Super Mario Land* handheld adventures being retired until *Super Mario 3D Land* many years later.

MORE SUPER MARIO LAND 2 MOMENTS

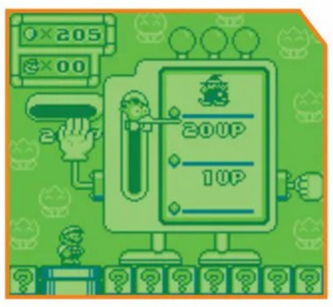
Ears A Treat

Pick up a carrot – an uncommon item in the world of *Super Mario* games – and you'll gain a nice pair of rabbit ears. Rabbit ears stop you from performing the spin jump, but they can help you clear long gaps as they allow you to hover by repeatedly smashing the jump button. This is particularly useful in Tree Zone.

Offbeat The Boss

Usually, a Mario boss is Bowser or one of the Koopalings. Not so in *Super Mario Land 2*, where they are in fact a series of animal-themed encounters. This bird guards the Tree Zone, and other thematically sound bosses protect their own golden coins – for example, an octopus in the Turtle Zone.

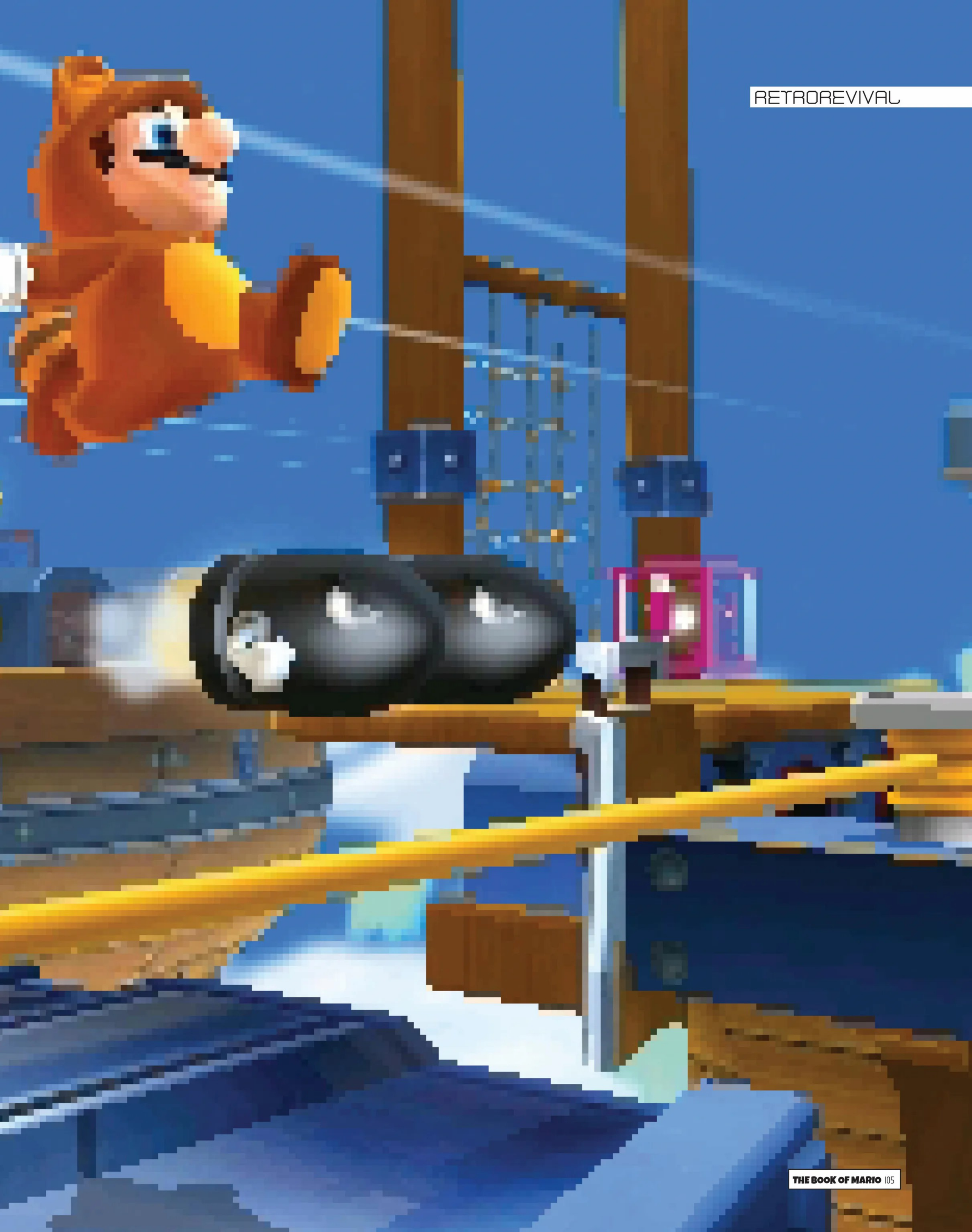
Jackpot!



Instead of getting an extra life for every 100 coins you earn, *Super Mario Land 2* lets you spend your coins to play mini-games. These can award you with items, but the biggest jackpot is a massive 20 (yes, twenty!) extra lives. Hitting this as we did here just feels absolutely magical – no need to worry about a Game Over screen.

Moonwalker

Malevolent stars are a pretty unusual sight in the Mario world, but sometimes you just need an appropriate hazard for a space walk. The low-gravity action sees Mario don an astronaut's gear and avoid objects in a similar manner to the swimming sections of other games. Could this have ended up inspiring Mario's spacefaring in *Galaxy*? Who knows…

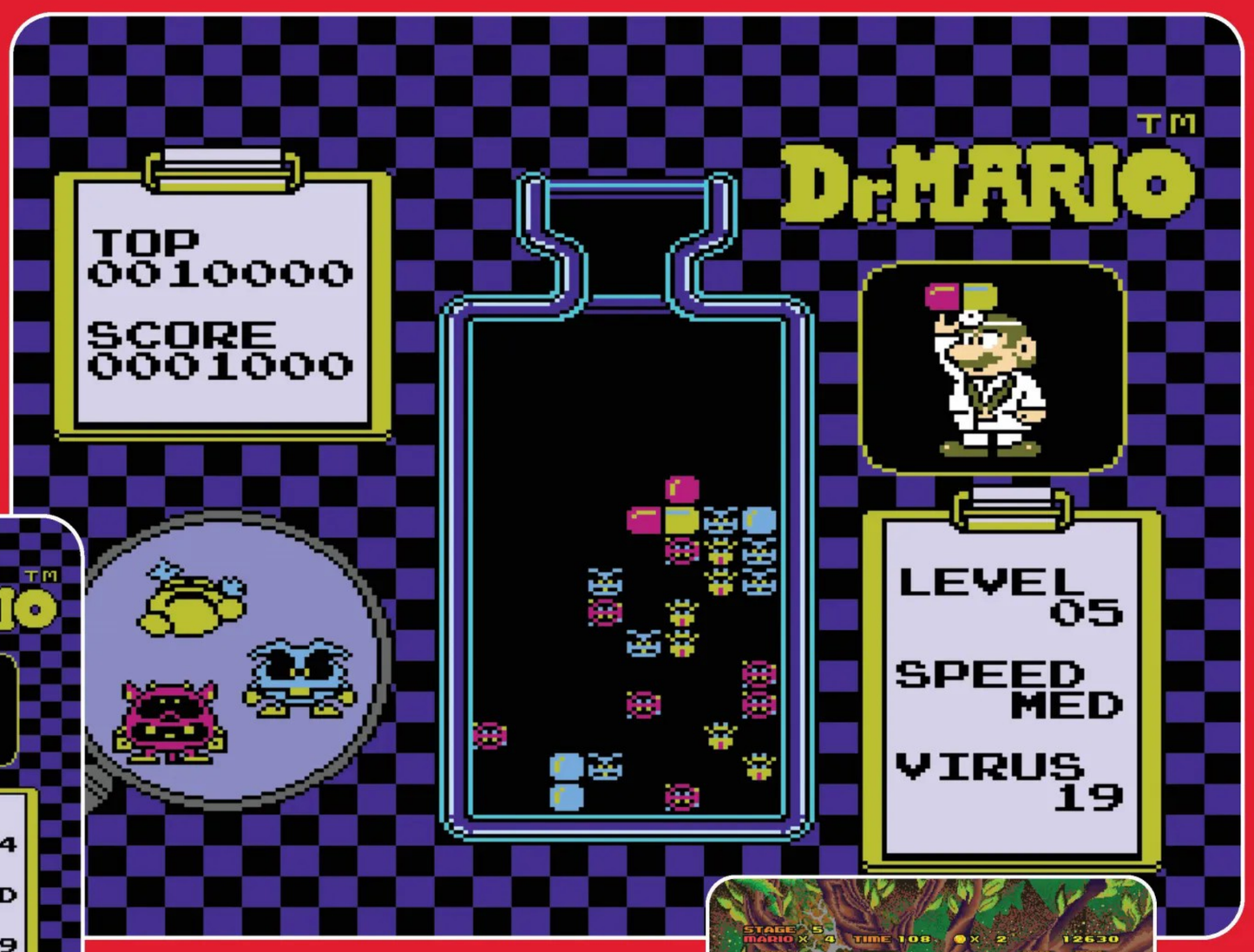


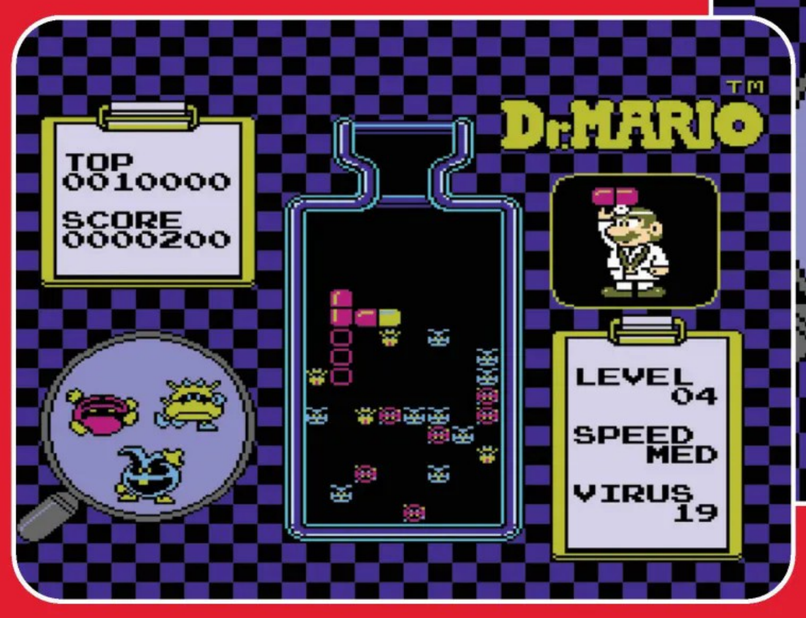
MISCELLANEOUS

DR MARIO

NES, 1990

■ As the Eighties came to a close, falling-block puzzle games were all the rage – and Nintendo knew that well, making truckloads of cash off the back of *Tetris* on the Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, the company wanted more of that particular market and designed a block puzzle of its own. Pills fall from the top of the bottle, and you have to mix matching coloured halves with the germs that lurk inside. Link enough of them together and you'll beat the bug – clear all the bugs and you win. We remember this best for its annoyingly infectious music.





HOTEL MARIO

CD-I, 1994

■ This puzzle game was developed as a result of the failed Nintendo/Philips SNES CD-ROM contract, for Philips' machine rather than Nintendo's. It's not quite as bad as the internet might have you believe, but few things are – it's still far from the greatness of most Mario games, though.

MARIO PAINT

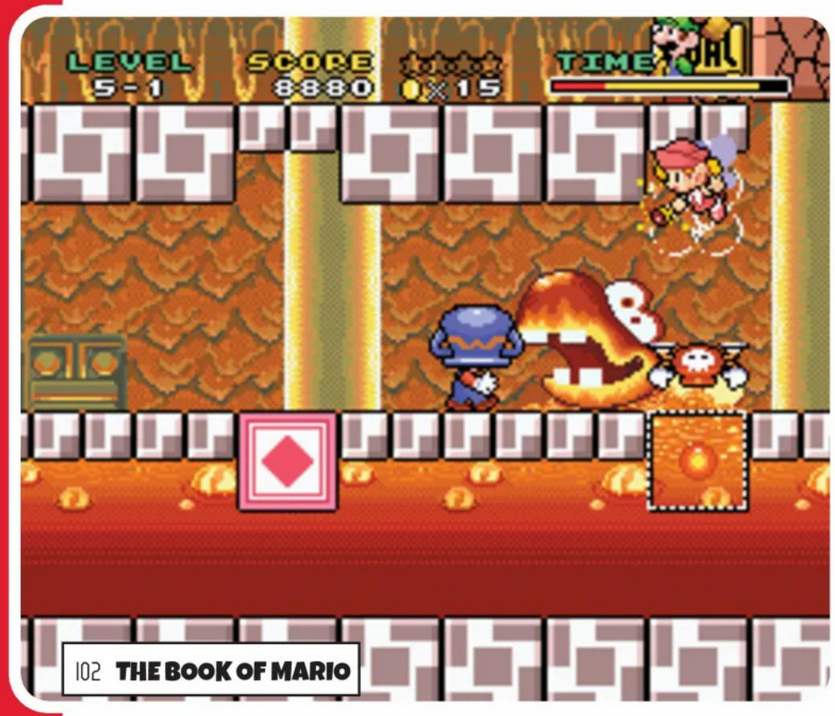
SNES, 1992

■ This art package came bundled with the SNES mouse, and could be used to create some beautiful animated images, which players were encouraged to record onto VHS tape for posterity. However, while the artistic tools were certainly impressive for their time, this game achieved longevity with the fans for an unexpected reason – its music composition tool. Its simplicity and flexibility were unprecedented on consoles, introducing many players worldwide to music creation. As a result, you can still find *Mario Paint* covers of many popular songs online today, and fans produced a standalone unofficial version of the composer.

MARIO'S PICROSS

GAME BOY, 1995

■ This logic picture puzzle doesn't necessarily have a great deal to do with Mario in practice, but it's so good that we can't resist highlighting it whenever we can. Look at the numbers, work out which squares to fill in, make a little image. Relaxing? Only if you make no mistakes...



MARIO & WARIO

SNES, 1993

■ A few years before hitting the big-time with the *Pokémon* series, Satoshi Tajiri and the team at Game Freak designed this rather fabulous puzzle game. It vaguely resembles *Lemmings*, in that you're charged with protecting a character that is oblivious to all danger (in this case because Wario has blinded him), but instead of changing Mario's actions, you change the environment around him to grant him safe passage. It's a real shame that this game wasn't ever released outside of Japan, but if you get the chance to try it we urge you to take it – it's an overlooked Mario gem.

THE HISTORY OF PAPER MARIO

BADGES OF HONOUR

Fasten these stat-boosting pins to your lapel with pride

PEEKABOO
If you can't use your ally's Tattle ability, then this badge displays enemy HP. Extremely useful – especially against bosses.

POWER BOUNCE
Go back to Mario's roots by chaining jump attacks all day (or at least until you miss an action command).

PIERCING BLOW
A potent hammer attack that slices through enemy defences, disregarding armour and shields.

TIMING TUTOR
Struggling to work out exactly when to tap during an attack? Timing Tutor's command prompts are super helpful.

BUMP ATTACK
Weaklings begone! Low-level enemies will be bumped off instantly with this equipped – no battle required.

LAST STAND
If you're on your last legs, this badge reduces damage taken by half. The effect stacks with multiple badges too.

TRIPLE DIP
Spend six FP to use not one, not two, but three items in a single, super-powered turn.

ZAP TAP
Damages enemies who make contact with Mario, and prevents your health from being leeched.

RETURN POSTAGE
Tough to obtain, but the counterattack status this grants deals half of all incoming damage back at enemies.

JUMPMAN
Commit to the jump and power up Mario's signature move with this badge – but at the cost of disabling your hammer.

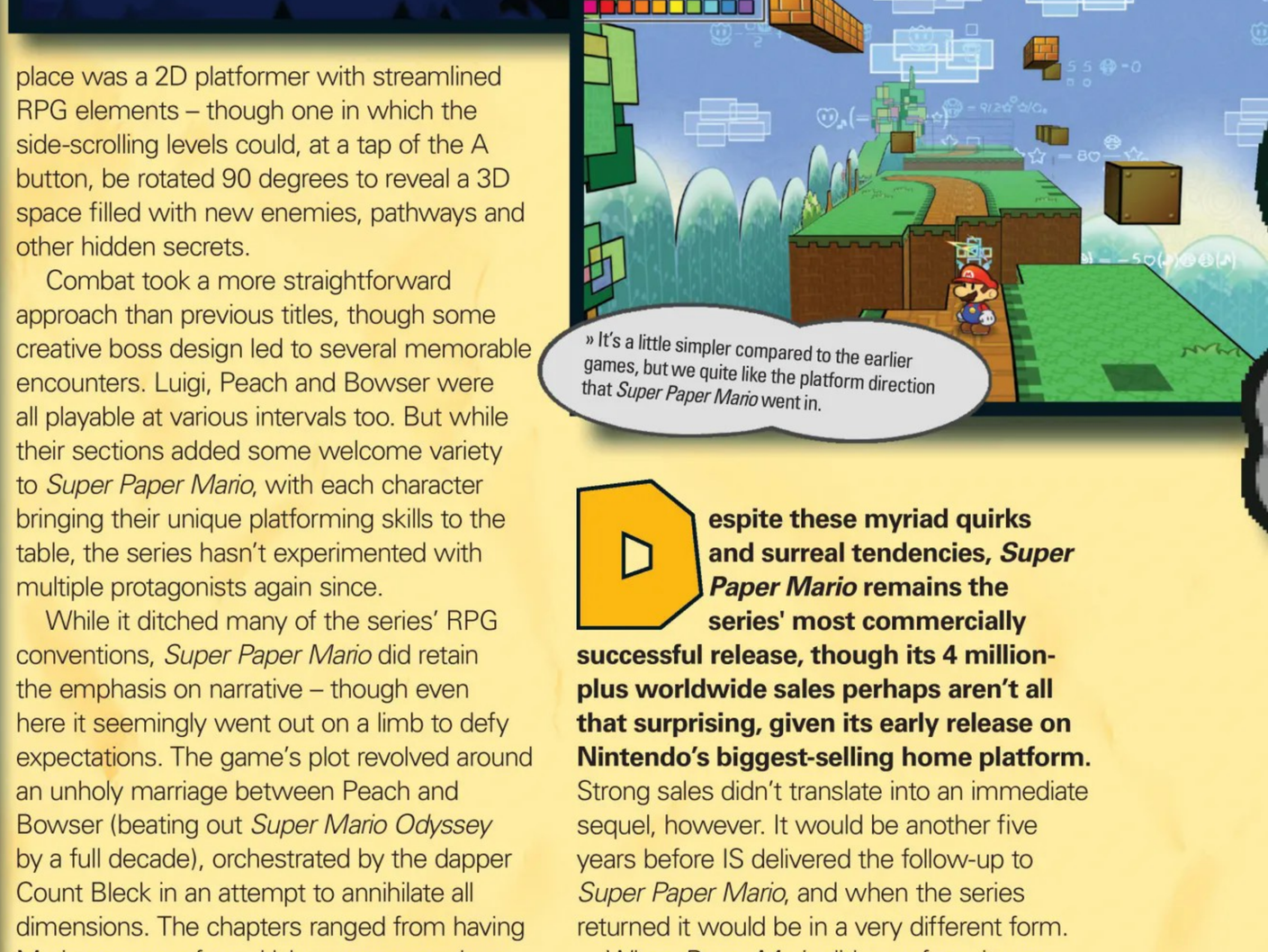
TORNADO JUMP
Winged enemies can be a real pain, but this special attack targets flying foes to knock them out of the air.

FIRE DRIVE
A blazing hammer attack that satisfyingly burns ground and low-flying enemies alike to mere ashes.

ALL OR NOTHING
The ultimate in risk-reward – nail your action commands for an attack boost, but miss them and you will do no damage.

ATTACK FX R
This novelty badge changes Mario's attack sounds to... crickets. Now every hit you land is an anticlimax!

L EMBLEM
For those who want to roleplay as Luigi, this badge will colour Mario's overalls green and blue.



» *Super Paper Mario* has some fantastic locations to visit and it looks absolutely glorious in places as well.

» It's a little simpler compared to the earlier games, but we quite like the platform direction that *Super Paper Mario* went in.

place was a 2D platformer with streamlined RPG elements – though one in which the side-scrolling levels could, at a tap of the A button, be rotated 90 degrees to reveal a 3D space filled with new enemies, pathways and other hidden secrets.

Combat took a more straightforward approach than previous titles, though some creative boss design led to several memorable encounters. Luigi, Peach and Bowser were all playable at various intervals too. But while their sections added some welcome variety to *Super Paper Mario*, with each character bringing their unique platforming skills to the table, the series hasn't experimented with multiple protagonists again since.

While it ditched many of the series' RPG conventions, *Super Paper Mario* did retain the emphasis on narrative – though even here it seemingly went out on a limb to defy expectations. The game's plot revolved around an unholy marriage between Peach and Bowser (beating out *Super Mario Odyssey* by a full decade), orchestrated by the dapper Count Bleck in an attempt to annihilate all dimensions. The chapters ranged from having Mario escape a forced labour camp run by a giant spider, to Peach negotiating with a nerdy chameleon via a dating simulator. Even by *Paper Mario* standards, it was all pretty bizarre.

» *Paper Mario: Sticker Star* is a rather weak link in the series, although the combat engine remains decent.

Despite these myriad quirks and surreal tendencies, *Super Paper Mario* remains the series' most commercially successful release, though its 4 million-plus worldwide sales perhaps aren't all that surprising, given its early release on Nintendo's biggest-selling home platform. Strong sales didn't translate into an immediate sequel, however. It would be another five years before IS delivered the follow-up to *Super Paper Mario*, and when the series returned it would be in a very different form.

When *Paper Mario* did resurface, it was revealed that the series was making its way to handheld for the first time. *Paper Mario: Sticker Star* certainly looked the part – the visual style had made the transition to the Nintendo 3DS intact – but it soon became apparent ahead of its 2012 release that this was yet another radical departure.

Unsurprisingly, stickers were the central theme here, and *Sticker Star* doubled down on this idea by working these consumable items into every aspect of the game. Battles, levelling, puzzles, progression

BOMBETTE

A strong, independent Bob-omb who don't need no man, Bombette is one of *Paper Mario*'s most memorable characters – blowing up enemies, blasting through walls and refusing to get back together with her ex-boyfriend.

KERSTI

We never knew sticker fairies were a thing, but then along came Kersti. The feisty, crown-shaped companion and her 'Paperize' ability are crucial to Mario's success in *Sticker Star*.

HUEY

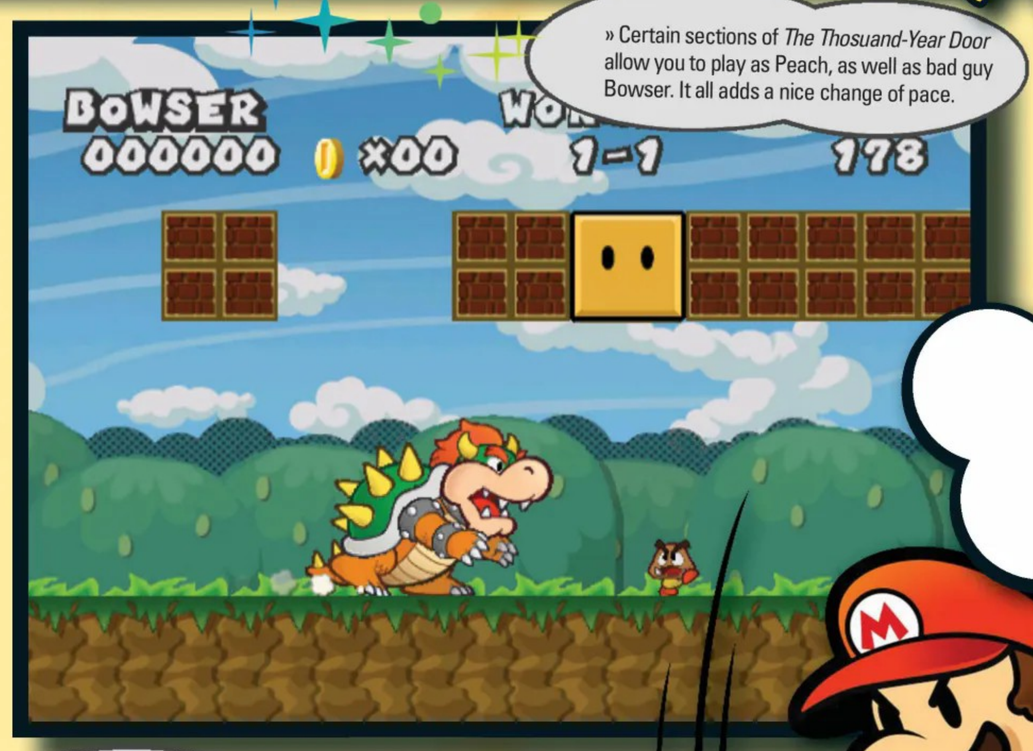
A floating paint can is just par for the course in Paper Mario. Huey's never-ending supply of paint is a helpful tool when returning colour to the land of Prisma. Plus he has eyes that change colour depending on his mood.

TIPPI

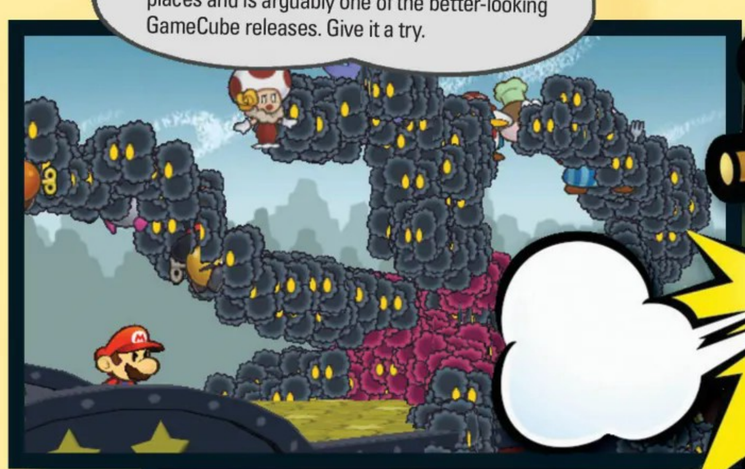
The first of Mario's Pixl partners, and his constant companion throughout *SPM*, Tippi's tattling and nose for hidden areas and secrets are invaluable in your journey through Flipside and beyond.

BOWSER

Mario's archnemesis has been given plenty of screen time as a villain throughout the series, though he's just as often been an unlikely ally, and even at times a playable character.



» Certain sections of *The Thosuand-Year Door* allow you to play as Peach, as well as bad guy Bowser. It all adds a nice change of pace.



» *The Thousand-Year Door* looks exceptional in places and is arguably one of the better-looking GameCube releases. Give it a try.

» There are some fantastic boss encounters in *The Thousand-Year Door*. Make sure you're up for the challenge, because they get tough.

"Paper Mario paid tribute to all the little things that add up to make the Mario games special"

quests and a more diverse and memorable cast of characters. Plus a *lot* of dialogue.

This last part wasn't unusual by any means – the series as a whole has always been extremely dense with text – but while scrolling through reams and reams of dialogue is one of the more tiresome features of *Paper Mario*, each game's wordiness does at least serve to highlight the stellar translation work on show. Given the often shoddy localisations received by even the most high-profile Japanese RPGs, the fact that these games have remained as consistently smart and funny as they have over the years is something of a miracle.

Thousand-Year Door, in particular, also stood apart in the realm of JRPGs. Much like the first *Paper Mario*, the opening chapters consciously evoked role-playing conventions. There was a quest to undertake, a village in peril, and a castle complete with a dragon to slay. The game grounded you in settings and situations you had played through dozens of times, before whipping the rug out from underneath you. The chapters here played out as vignettes that riffed on everything from gangster films and pro wrestling, to *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Murder On The Orient Express* – and that's without mentioning 'For Pigs the Bell Tolls', which might just be the best single level in any Mario RPG. That it was one of the few Mario games set outside the Mushroom Kingdom only added to this sense of joyful discovery. The self-referential streak remained, but it was supported by the originality and imagination of a development team really coming into its own.

Between the chapters in *TTYD*, Peach and Bowser had their own short sequences. Trapped on the Moon, the princess chatted with a supercomputer that was slowly falling in love with her, while Bowser stomped through side-scrolling, *Super Mario Bros*-esque versions of previous levels – only to discover that Mario had already been and gone. *Paper Mario* had never been this expansive, this inventive or just this straight-up great. And there's an argument to say that it never has been since.

If *Thousand-Year Door* is the most sweeping, 'classical' RPG in the series, then its sequel, *Super Paper Mario*, is the weirdest and most peculiar entry. Kawade made a point of pitching the third *Paper Mario* title as a substantially different experience from the two that had come before it. He wanted to deliver something that players hadn't seen before – not just in *Thousand-Year Door* but in any Mario game. His eureka moment, according to a 2007 interview, came during a train journey. While staring along the aisle of a carriage, Kawade envisioned a classic 2D *Super Mario Bros* level, but from a brand-new perspective. Producer Kensuke Tanabe was similarly enthused by the idea, and from this observation the dimension-swapping conceit of *Super Paper Mario* began to take shape.

Originally a GameCube title, *SPM* was quietly delayed from its 2006 release date and eventually arrived the following year on the already wildly successful Wii. When the game landed, it quickly became apparent that Kawade had succeeded in his goal. Gone were the turn-based battles, the perk-enabling badges and, for the most part, the 3D environments of Paper Marios past. In their

THE HISTORY OF PAPER MARIO

MARIO HAS SQUEEZED HIS PORTLY FRAME INTO ALMOST EVERY GAMING GENRE OVER THE YEARS, BUT NINTENDO'S MERRY MASCOT HAS RARELY FELT AS FLESHED OUT AS IN INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS' PAPER MARIO SERIES. ROSS HAMILTON LOOKS BACK AT HOW THESE QUIRKY SPIN-OFFS UNFOLDED

MARIO CLASH

VIRTUAL BOY, 1995

■ This single-screen action game is based on Mario's pre-super years. Enemies emerge, and your job is to take them out by any means necessary – stomping and shell-throwing being the most common. Unlike the older *Mario Bros* coin-up, there's an element of depth provided by the Virtual Boy's stereoscopic display.

SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS

SNES, 1996

■ You'd imagine a game with *Super Mario World*'s characters, *Final Fantasy VI*'s developer and *Donkey Kong Country*'s signature graphical technique would be the ultimate SNES game – and while it isn't (it's not the deepest RPG), *Super Mario RPG* is a good game that does a lot of things right.

MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA

GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2003

■ After finding success with both *Super Mario RPG* and *Paper Mario*, our hero (yes, and his brother) embarked on a third RPG adventure in a quest to rescue Princess Peach's voice. Fantastic self-referential humour and a unique battle system elevate this to the upper tier of Game Boy Advance RPGs.

MARIO VS DONKEY KONG

GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2004

■ Spinning off from the Donkey Kong and Mario series, this puzzle game in which you direct Mini-Marios is a successor to the Game Boy *Donkey Kong* game released in the mid-Nineties. It became a big success, spinning off a number of sequels of its own on Nintendo's handheld platforms.

SUPER MARIO BALL

GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2004

■ Sonic was in a semi-decent pinball game because he already curled up into a ball – that's what hedgehogs do, after all. Mario, not content to be outdone by his rival, spent a decade learning to curl into a ball so he could star in a semi-decent pinball game too.

DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION: MARIO MIX

GAMECUBE, 2005

■ Konami seems to have felt that its popular music game series needed a bit more Nintendo love for its GameCube incarnation, so it came up with a track list almost entirely comprised of memorable themes from older Mario games.

PUZZLE & DRAGONS Z + SUPER MARIO BROS. EDITION

3DS, 2015

■ *Puzzle & Dragons* was a mobile phenomenon, so it was a natural fit to bring over to the 3DS – and while you're doing that, why not stick the world's most famous plumber in the mix too? So they did.

MARIO & RABBIDS: KINGDOM BATTLE

SWITCH, 2017

■ We had absolutely no idea what a crossover game between Mario and the *Rayman*-derived Rabbids would be like, and we were very surprised when it turned out to be a strategy game. It was also a surprise year-one gem for Switch.

PAPER PALS

Ten of Paper Mario's most memorable cardboard characters

GOOMBELLA

A spunky Goomba with a heart of gold, Goombella is Mario's first partner in *TTYD*. A student at the University of Goom, her smarts and Tattle ability are key for identifying enemy weaknesses.

MADAME FLURRIE

A retired actress with an impressive set of pipes, Flurrie's Gale Force ability will literally blow enemies away, along with any paper scenery that isn't firmly secured.

COUNT BLECK

The big nasty of *Super Paper Mario* desires the total destruction of every dimension. He certainly looks the part, but there's more to this villain than first meets the eye.

MS. MOWZ

Badge thief, retail entrepreneur and the only optional party member in *TTYD*, Ms. Mowz specialises in seduction by wooing enemies with a kiss... before stealing their items.

LADY BOW

In *Paper Mario*, Bow enlists Mario to take down the giant Clubba who's been terrorising her mansion. She's also, according to some, "the cutest Boo of all time."

– a vibrant combination of 2D characters and backgrounds in a setting that brought to mind a children's pop-up book.

"This style simply didn't exist on the path everyone was on at the time, but you could sense a great deal of feeling toward Super Mario in the pictures," said Nakajima.

The concept also resonated with Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto, who consulted on the game as a producer. This was the moment of inspiration that IS had been waiting for. And sure enough, the bold lines, bright colours and cut-out characters from Aoyama's original drawing would go on to define the aesthetic of not just this game, but the series it would eventually spawn.

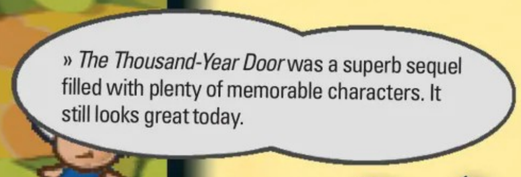
» It took nearly four years for people to play *Paper Mario* after it was shown off at Space World '97. It was worth the wait.

Paper Mario, in its new form, debuted at Nintendo's Space World '97, but it would be another four years before players outside Japan would get to sample the game. For fans in Europe and Australia, this was also the first time a Mario RPG of any kind had landed on their shores – the substantial cost of localisation for the text-heavy *Super Mario RPG* meant that it had never made it beyond Japan and North America. Fortunately, *Paper Mario* proved to have been worth the wait.

The game's story revolved around Bowser kidnapping Peach (stop us if you've heard this one before), but its mix of knowing whimsy and affectionate gags made it the perfect, light-hearted complement to Mario's tour of the papercraft Mushroom Kingdom. There was a real celebratory air to *Paper Mario*. It paid tribute to all the little things that add up to make the Mario games special – the minor characters and background elements that are never properly acknowledged, but without which the series wouldn't have its charm. The fact that Mario's partners included a Goomba, a Koopa, a Bob-omb and a Boo was testament to this, too.

In addition to a bigger roster of partners, *Paper Mario* added more special moves and introduced status-boosting badges to the mix, adapting and fleshing out the battle system from *Super Mario RPG*. But while the foundations of Square's title were still very much present, this was a game with an identity all its own. Though sales were once again dampened by a release on a declining console – it arrived in the twilight months of the N64, shortly before the launch of the GameCube – the critical reception was outstanding, and Intelligent Systems quickly got the go-ahead to begin working on a sequel for Nintendo's plucky purple box.

Paper Mario 2 officially became *Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door* at the Game Developer's Conference in 2003. Intelligent Systems retained the core of the first game's development team for the project, with Ryota Kawade reprising his role of chief director, and set about building on its initial success. *Paper Mario* absolutely wasn't broken or in need of fixing, and so IS took on the maxim of 'evolution, not revolution'. The result was an RPG that cemented everything great about its predecessor, while adding a more compelling story, a greater variety of



» *The Thousand-Year Door* was a superb sequel filled with plenty of memorable characters. It still looks great today.

and bosses all required the collection and application of stickers, with other staple *Paper Mario* elements phased out to make way. While *Sticker Star* did revert back to the turn-based battles of *Paper Mario* and *TTYD*, these too relied on stickers, which were used to carry out attacks and special moves. The 3DS title also eschewed the other RPG elements that had permeated the first three games. Instead, it could most accurately be called an action-adventure, with a world divided into short, obstacle-filled levels, a sparse narrative and a greater emphasis on puzzle-solving.

These changes reflected some fairly significant moves behind the scenes at Intelligent Systems. Naohiko Aoyama, whose piece of concept art had sparked *Paper Mario* to life in the Nineties, returned, this time to serve as director, but all told around 90 per cent of the team on *Sticker Star* were working on the series for the first time. Kensuke Tanabe's involvement was also greater this time around, as was that of Miyamoto, whose most significant requests were that the team use only existing Mario characters, and that they lose the supposedly unnecessary story. A vocal group of fans cried sacrilege, but *Sticker Star*'s directors concurred, adhering to the Miyamoto doctrine of design following from function – story be damned.

These principles would continue to inform the design of the most recent *Paper Mario* game to date. The 2016 Wii U title, *Color Splash*, might revolve around paint, and its turn-based battles might make use of cards rather than stickers, but its lineage is clear. Speaking to Kotaku, producer Risa Tabata explained the change in direction further:

"Since we already have the established *Mario & Luigi* RPG series, in order to differentiate these two series that we have running concurrently, we've tried to focus more on the non-RPG elements for the *Paper Mario* games… In terms of what we focus on for the *Paper Mario* series, we focus on puzzle-solving [and] humour."

This recalibration of the series is understandable, even if it's not necessarily what fans want to hear. Visually, however, there's no denying that *Color Splash* is dazzling – its paint-spattered characters and chunky cardboard environments delivering more emphatically on the series' arts-and-crafts aesthetic than any of its predecessors. An early location named Ruddy Road is particularly spectacular, with one sequence seeing the entire level roll up behind you in evenly creased cardboard segments, as Mario runs towards the screen to escape.

Moments like this are a reminder of how utterly beguiling *Paper Mario* can be at its best. Certain changes are bound to rankle, but the series' visual inventiveness and charming humour have remained constant. Fortunately, it doesn't look set to be crumpling any time soon, though whether we'll get another traditional RPG in the mould of *Paper Mario* or *Thousand-Year Door* remains to be seen.

Still, as fondly as those adventures are remembered, it's admirable to see Miyamoto and Intelligent Systems continue to redefine *Paper Mario* after all these years. What started out as a comic role-playing game with a unique visual twist has now been torn, creased, folded and scrunched into shapes that span genres, platforms and entire dimensions. What form it'll take next is anyone's guess.

» The most recent *Paper Mario* is something of a disappointment. Here's hoping later games retain the earlier magic.

DOUBLE TROUBLE

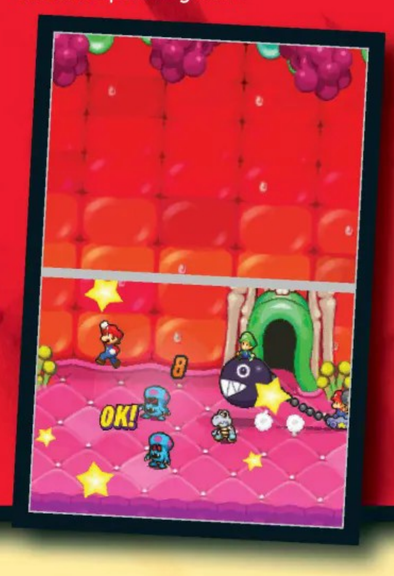
Paper Mario isn't the only RPG spin-off series to explore

MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA

With the two brothers given equal billing, *Superstar Saga* set the formula for AlphaDream's series to come – inventive platforming puzzles and timing-focused, turn-based combat. In Cackletta and Fawful, it also has some of the best villains in any Mario RPG, and 2017 saw it receive an expanded 3DS remake.

MARIO & LUIGI: PARTNERS IN TIME

The brothers partnered up with their baby selves in the series' second adventure. An early DS title, *PIT* made full use of the system's key feature, with the two pairs splitting up to tackle challenges on the top and bottom screens, and towering bosses spanning both.



MARIO & LUIGI: BOWSER'S INSIDE STORY

A *Fantastic Voyage* homage with a Nintendo-themed twist, *BIS* saw the Mario brothers inadvertently inhaled by Bowser, whose progress on the isometric overworld required Mario and Luigi to complete 2D challenges within his body. The two worlds collided in battle too – players could fight enemies as Bowser, before inhaling them for the brothers to finish the job.

MARIO & LUIGI: DREAM TEAM BROS

After a decade of adventures, the spotlight shifted firmly to Luigi in the series' 3DS debut. Aside from the regular top-down gameplay, *Dream Team Bros* featured 2D levels set inside the younger Mario brother's dreams, with the game's surreal Luiginary Works setting the stage for some inventive touchscreen-enabled puzzles.

MARIO & LUIGI: PAPER JAM BROS

Finally, the two major Mario RPGs collide. While *Paper Jam Bros* is still very much a *Mario & Luigi* game, it managed to incorporate some trademark visual and battle system elements from its sister series. Plus, there are comic moments aplenty as Bowser and Peach meet their Paper doubles.

Images courtesy of Mariowiki.com

Super Mario 3D Land

SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE

RETROREVIVAL

» 3DS » NINTENDO » 2011

I'm sure many of you reading this have a particular friend that they shared games with. My gaming friend is called Josh. We became friends because we were sat next to each other in Maths in middle school and were quickly crowbarred apart because we kept talking about games.

The game we spoke about was *Mario Sunshine* – we'd go into the intricacies of where all the collectibles were and how to dig up all the secrets, and we'd repeat the process all over again when *Mario 64* came out on the DS. We were two parts of an incredibly efficient game-clearing machine. If internet game guides were as important then as they are now – and if websites would hire pre-teens to write them – we'd have made a killing.

I fell out of contact with Josh for a while when we both went to separate universities. We met up again after three or so years at a friend's house party. It was 2013, and I had just bought a 3DS and had it in my overnight bag. After sinking a few beers I let slip I had a 3DS and *Mario 3D Land* nearby, and his eyes lit up. I stumbled to my bag and we basically squatted on the floor rinsing the hell out of *Mario 3D Land* for hours, doing what we do best. Honestly, we must've been there for hours and almost fell asleep at one point.

Super Mario 3D Land is by no means the best Mario game, it's kind of just *fine*. A perfect example of an average Mario game. The 3D effects are pretty neat, and the presentation is stellar as always, but the challenge just isn't there. But that's fine, for two drunk old friends, it might as well have been the best game on Earth at that point.

They say the best of friends pick up where they left off, no matter how long they've been apart. And my experience, on a cool summer's night exhausting everything *Super Mario 3D Land* had to offer with my best friend, is a testament to that. ✱

» Mario meets plenty of characters on his travels. Some are helpful and some will get in the portly plumber's way.

» Poor old Mario has been pushing his luck, so he's now being advised that he's in potential danger. Careful you don't get hit!

Mario games are, almost without exception, filled with delightful moments. They stem from the charming primary colours of the visuals, ingenious pieces of level design, and endearing character animations. They make you smile, through the glee of discovering a new mechanic, or the sense of achievement that comes from mastering a fiendish platforming section. They might make you cheer when you save the princess (or grumble when it turns out she's in another castle), but they may not make you laugh all too often. The *Paper Mario* series does. A lot.

Across five games and more than 20 years, Intelligent Systems has developed a spin-off series whose only consistent traits have been the visual style from which it gets its name, and a seemingly never-ending supply of irreverent humour and self-referential jokes. Writing a funny game isn't easy, but then that's the benefit of having more than 30 years of tropes, iconography and collective nostalgia to draw upon: everyone's in on the joke.

All Mario RPGs share one common ancestor: Square's 1996 SNES title, the aptly named *Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars*. A stylish marriage of traditional RPG conventions and many of the visual trappings of Nintendo's platformer, it marked Mario's first foray into the genre and introduced a number of key elements that have featured off and on ever since.

» There's a large number of items you can use in *Paper Mario*. Some enemies are impervious to certain attacks, though.

Platforming, puzzle-solving and turn-based battles with action commands – timed button presses that deal extra damage when successful – were all present. So too was a well-written story peppered with genuinely funny jokes. This was a Mario game with an honest-to-goodness sense of humour.

While calling *Super Mario RPG* a cult favourite might be doing it a slight disservice, it's fair to say that it doesn't enjoy the widespread adoration reserved for some of Mario's other outings. Though reception was positive and sales were strong, particularly in Japan, just three months after the game hit shelves the Nintendo 64 arrived with a bang. For all its impressively rendered graphics and nuanced battle and levelling systems, the RPG was almost immediately overshadowed by the platforming brilliance and technical splendour of *Super Mario 64*.

Still, the Nintendo and Square collaboration had been a success, and attention had already turned to a possible N64 sequel. But the relationship between the two companies famously soured soon after. Lower development costs saw Square jump ship to Sony's PlayStation, and Nintendo was left with no developer for its nascent RPG series. Enter Intelligent Systems.

A trusted development partner with credits including *Famicom Wars* and the *Fire Emblem* series, Intelligent Systems (IS) was a natural candidate to take on the project that was then known simply as Super Mario RPG 2. As assignments go, few could be more exciting, but the magnitude of the task ahead was also

"A spin-off series with a seemingly never-ending supply of irreverent humour and self-referential jokes"

intimidating: just how exactly *do* you make a Mario game in the wake of *Super Mario 64*?

At the studio's Kyoto office, the first and most pressing concerns were visual. IS needed a graphical identity that would instantly mark its game out as distinct from the mainline Mario series. In a 2012 'Iwata Asks' roundtable, project manager Kenji Nakajima recalled the difficulties the team faced:

"We ran into trouble deciding how it should look in order to introduce a different theme to that of the main series… At first, we broke into teams and worked in parallel on making about three sample models."

Initially, these models bore little fruit. But that would soon change with the arrival of a young designer named Naohiko Aoyama. A newcomer to IS at the time, he knocked up a rough concept image between working on the samples and, almost on a whim, submitted it. Soon after, he was called into a planning meeting and told to bring his picture

SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

SIGHTSEEING GUIDE

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TIME ON DELFINO ISLAND WITH OUR HANDY GUIDE TO ALL THE MOST EXCITING TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

PIANTA VILLAGE

■ Generations of Piantas have called this village home. Residents live up in the trees, while enormous wild mushrooms thrive on the ground below.

NOKI BAY

■ The home of the Nokis is a land of steep cliffs and abundant waters. Unfortunately, since Mario has arrived, pollution has taken hold in the sea here.

CORONA MOUNTAIN

■ Residents of the island like the hot springs at the foot of this volcano, but Mario will have to venture into its dangerous lava caves to succeed here.

GELATO BEACH

■ Sun-lovers will want to head to this beach at the south of Delfino Island, as it's the biggest around – just watch out for the marauding Wigglers that pop up.

SIRENA BEACH

■ As the night draws in, visitors to Delfino Island retreat to this beach, famed for its magnificent sunset views and the four-star Hotel Delfino.

PINNA PARK

■ The small island that makes up the 'tail' of Delfino Island is host to an amusement park, featuring exciting rides and maybe even a giant metal Bowser...

RICCO HARBOUR

■ The biggest port on Delfino Island is unsurprisingly full of boats, and is said to be the best place on the island to eat some freshly caught seafood.

BIANCO HILLS

■ This picturesque residential community is located in the rolling hills, right by a magnificent lake. Gentle breezes keep the famous windmills spinning.

SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE™

AFTER REVOLUTIONISING 3D GAMING WITH SUPER MARIO 64, NINTENDO HAD THE UNENVIABLE TASK OF DELIVERING A WORTHY SUCCESSOR. NICK THORPE TALKS TO YOSHIAKI KOIZUMI TO FIND OUT HOW HIS TEAM DELIVERED ITS SUN-DRENCHED SEQUEL...

» Clever use of space gives Pianta Village hidden depth – this hanging pathway is under the main level.

"We lived up to the challenge of making a more realistic Mario game compared to the visuals you'd expect" Yoshiaki Koizumi

we lived up to the challenge of making a slightly more realistic Mario game compared to the visuals you'd normally expect." It's fair to say that many of the effects were breathtaking – the sunset lighting at Sirena Beach and the heat haze visible in the distance in Delfino Plaza really drove home the feeling of a tropical island. However, the water effects stole the show – the gentle waves of the game's sea, with sunlight reflecting off its surface, were amongst the most realistic ever seen in a videogame, and still look fantastic today.

Reflecting on *Super Mario Sunshine*, it seems like it would always have been in a tough spot. Following up a game like *Super Mario 64* is hard, and while *Super Mario Sunshine* was criticised for not being different enough, we can only imagine what people would have thought of some of the other ideas being considered for the game. There had already been a surprised reaction when the GameCube's launch was accompanied not by a *Mario* platform game, but *Luigi's Mansion* – a ghost-hoovering spin-off. We can very easily see a situation in which players would have baulked at a *Mario* disaster recovery game instead of something more like *Super Mario 64*. If *Super Mario Sunshine* disappointed some, that's only because it was following a game that redefined an entire genre. Some of its experiments didn't quite come off as well as hoped, but that actually makes it more endearing – it's a sign that Nintendo is always looking for new directions for its veteran mascot.

Still, *Super Mario Sunshine* is a fantastic game. You can see that from the high review scores and the sales, you can see it in fan attempts to remake the game (including a fantastic Nintendo DS version), and you can feel it when you play the game – there are few things in gaming as fun as knocking over a Wiggler with sand dunes, or finally catching that pesky Shadow Mario. And that's what matters at the end of the day – *Super Mario Sunshine* might not have had quite the same impact as its predecessor, but games aren't about impact, they're about entertainment. And years on, *Sunshine* is still as entertaining as ever.

DELFINO AIRSTRIP

■ This small airstrip serves as the entry and exit point for all air travel to the island. We'd expect something bigger – maybe most tourists travel by boat?

DELFINO PLAZA

■ The commercial hub of Delfino Island is also the hub world of the game. Merchant Piantas set out their stalls with fruit, and boats ferry goods to and fro.

» A more industrial environment, like Ricco Harbour, gives Mario apparatus to climb.

HYDRO HEAVEN

SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE JUST WOULDN'T BE THE SAME WITHOUT FLUDD, THE VERSATILE WATER CANNON THAT GAVE MARIO SOME NEW MOVES

SQUIRT NOZZLE

■ Your standard hose or water pistol attachment, which is necessary in a wide variety of situations – you'll clean graffiti, extinguish fires and fill containers with this attachment. Pressing the Y button will put your viewpoint behind Mario's shoulder, enabling you to aim more accurately when targeting tricky enemies.

HOVER NOZZLE

■ Though you can use these twin downward jets to attack from above, their most common use is as a pseudo-jetpack that can keep Mario aloft for a few seconds after a jump. If you're using this to clean graffiti, make sure you pull backwards just before your jets cut out, or you'll land smack-bang in the goop.

ROCKET NOZZLE

■ When triple jumps, spin jumps and even wall jumps can't get you where you need to go, build up some water pressure and then let it off for an almighty blast into the sky. This will easily let you to leap tall buildings. There are limitations, though - you can't blast off while swimming.

TURBO NOZZLE

■ Using the force of FLUDD's tank being discharged at high pressure, Mario can run fast and even jet through water – like when people strap fire extinguishers to wheelchairs. It's a surprisingly sustained effect and Mario is pretty hard to handle, but it does let him stick two fingers up at old rival Sonic.

» Delfino Plaza is a stunning location, especially as the GameCube has the power to draw it all in one screen.

show in *Super Mario Sunshine*. Many of the game's objectives involved using FLUDD to clean up graffiti and pollution, and the four new moves that Mario gains would be impossible without it. FLUDD was even given some screen time as a character – thanks to the artificial intelligence bestowed upon it by Professor E Gadd, FLUDD could actually talk. But the addition of the device didn't come without problems.

"The difficulty of jumping onto platforms has been an issue in 3D platforming games since *Super Mario 64*. To ease the problem, users could use FLUDD to shoot water downwards so they could fall down as if they were experiencing low gravity," says Koizumi. "We put a limit on the amount of water available, and it was actually a lot of work for us to place water sources!" The need to incorporate water sources is one which is usually cleverly dealt with – you can see how the team has included fountains and puddles and even an indoor swimming pool in locations throughout the game. However, sometimes even this isn't enough, and the game rewards you with a water bottle for defeating an enemy. It's an inelegant solution, but one which proves necessary given the constraints imposed by the design.

Luckily, the level design as a whole was something that Nintendo had a better idea of how to handle. The biggest advantage of the GameCube hardware was that it could render larger and more complex game worlds, and Koizumi and his team relished the chance to work with them. "With the extra space in the stages, we were able to set up shortcuts by preparing jump platforms to make it easy to get around, and

» Creative thought was required to work series staples like Boos into a tropical island setting.

gamers will be able to look past or even embrace the fact that *Super Mario Sunshine* sticks extremely close to *Super Mario 64*'s formula, others will find that the game suffers from a lack of innovation. The game's technical issues and often-gimmicky design are still tougher to ignore, and they combine to make the game seem surprisingly unpolished and somewhat rushed at times," he concluded, referencing his criticism of FLUDD and the game's often wayward camera.

The criticisms certainly aren't invalid. *Super Mario Sunshine*'s camera is often wayward, depicting Mario as a silhouette and all objects around him as a basic question mark as it gets stuck behind a wall. The fact that FLUDD and its additional moves never returned could also mark it out as a gimmick. And if it feels like the game had a short development cycle, Gerstmann could well be right – after all, there was just a year between the release of the final game and the Spaceworld 2001 prototype that it barely resembled. It's certainly telling that a third of the game's 120 Shines are attributed to the hub world of Delfino Plaza, rather than any of the main courses that Mario explores. Yet ultimately, this didn't matter a great deal to the players themselves. *Super Mario Sunshine* was the best GameCube platform game available by a country mile when it released, and sold by the bucketload, shifting 5.5 million copies – fewer than previous main *Mario* games (in fact, only half of what *Mario 64* sold) but still comfortably multi-platinum, and that's a big deal as it wasn't a launch game and never came bundled with the console.

When looking back at his own favourite achievements with the game, Koizumi singles out the visuals enabled by the GameCube. "The 3D rendering performance was quite high for the hardware at the time, so I feel like we succeeded with the graphics to make the world feel real," Koizumi recalls. "I felt

LET'S DO THE ODYSSEY

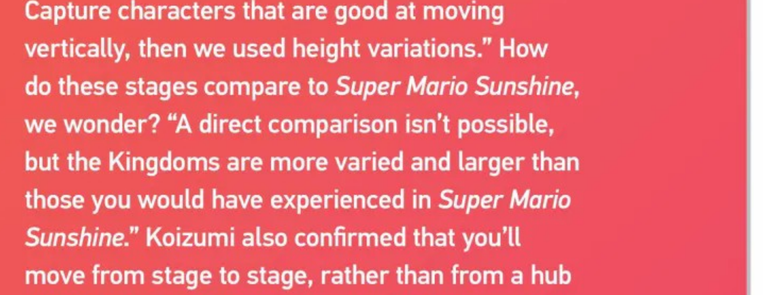
HOW SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE'S DESIGN HAS INFLUENCED NINTENDO'S LATEST ADVENTURE

It's fair to say that *Super Mario Sunshine* was considered a bit of an odd duck at the time it was released. The use of more realistic urban environments was a big departure for Mario. So too was FLUDD, the tool that helped *Mario* clean up Delfino Island, thanks to the way it changed how Mario interacted with his environment.

Skip ahead some 15 years and the recently released *Super Mario Odyssey* is the first *Mario* game since *Super Mario Sunshine* to employ open 3D environments and mission-based progression. While you won't see FLUDD, ice levels are most definitely back, it's also fair to say that *Odyssey* is revisiting many of *Sunshine*'s eccentricities. For a start, the game mixes more fantastical environments with ones that draw heavily from our real lives, such as the urban New Donk City – and as in *Sunshine*'s prototype stage, it will feature actual humans. The game is also set to feature another sentient tool for Mario to wear, which greatly affects how he interacts with the environment around him.

When we remark on the similarities, Koizumi reveals that it was a coincidence of development, "Mario's had companions on his adventure before, like FLUDD and Luma, but this isn't actually what we were initially aiming for with Cappy," he explains. "In the same way that FLUDD in *Super Mario Sunshine* can erase graffiti and attack enemies, the origin for Cappy in *Super Mario Odyssey* was in the game design. It was after we gave him some personality and character that we ended up with what we have now."

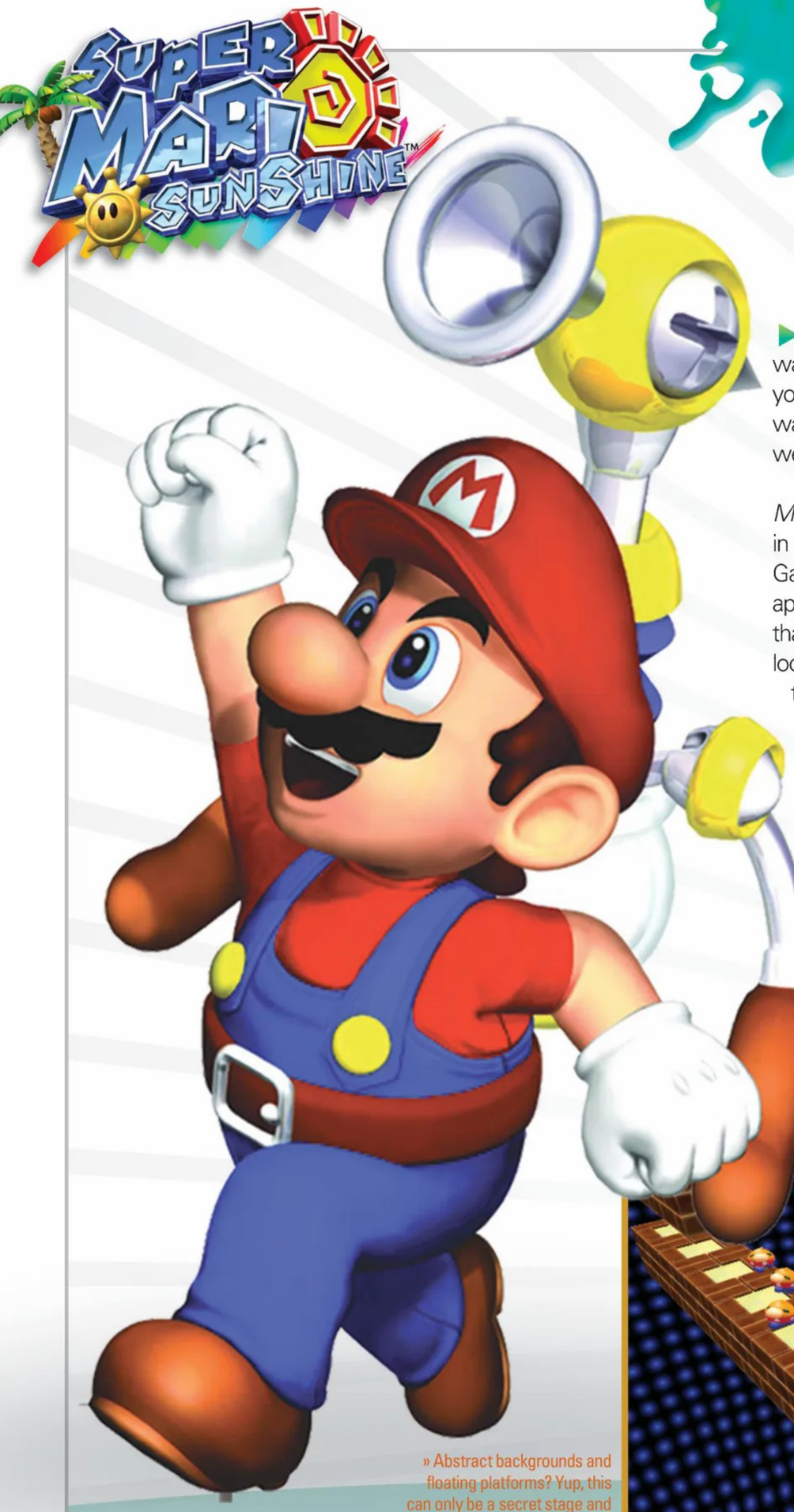
Cappy is, much like FLUDD, a versatile companion which fulfils a number of gameplay functions. "Cappy plays an important role in Mario's moves in *Super Mario Odyssey*. Mario can throw his cap to destroy things in the stage or use it as a platform to jump long distances," says Koizumi. "You can also use a power that lets you control objects or enemies in a stage by hitting them with your cap." With a simple flick of the wrist, Mario flings Cappy at sentient creatures and takes control of them – you can tell they've been hit with Capture because enemies gain Mario's distinctive red cap and moustache. "We



are always trying to come up with new moves for the player to do in our 3D *Mario* platformers," Koizumi continues. "We implemented this Capture ability that lets you use the abilities of various objects as a way to include more moves in this game than ever before. Players can create their own gameplay experience by looking at enemies and objects and imaging what kind of moves they'd be able to do."

This new ability has caused a rethink of how stages are designed, as compared to *Super Mario Sunshine*. "In the world that Mario is exploring in *Super Mario Odyssey*, there are a variety of Kingdoms (ie stages) both large and small," says Koizumi. "Kingdoms where you can use the new Capture move to control fast-moving characters are very wide. But for stages where you can Capture characters that are good at moving vertically, then we used height variations." How do these stages compare to *Super Mario Sunshine*, we wonder? "A direct comparison isn't possible, but the Kingdoms are more varied and larger than those you would have experienced in *Super Mario Sunshine*." Koizumi also confirmed that you'll move from stage to stage, rather than from a hub world to stages. "There's no central hub area like Delfino Plaza, but instead each Kingdom you visit plays its own role in the story."

Super Mario Odyssey is on sale now. Give it a try and you'll be able to see for yourself if it lives up to all the critical acclaim (it does).



» Abstract backgrounds and floating platforms? Yup, this can only be a secret stage and it's rather tough, too.

island as the setting, making it somewhere that was rich in variety and also could feel like somewhere you'd want to go yourself," explains Koizumi. "I wanted to create a game where you could feel like you were sightseeing on holiday."

The result was Delfino Island, a new setting for the *Mario* series, shaped like and named after a dolphin in tribute to the development codename for the GameCube. The usual platform game tropes didn't apply here as everything had to be on-theme, meaning that there was no room for slippery ice worlds. All of the locations on Delfino Island are themed around things that you would expect to see at a resort – public tourist attractions, like an amusement park, a beach and a hotel, as well as the more functional locations including villages and a harbour. Likewise, the Mushroom Kingdom's inhabitants weren't to be found in abundance. Instead, Mario would interact with the inhabitants of the island, the palm tree-headed Piantas and the shell-wearing Nokis.

Delfino Island made for a beautiful setting, but it wasn't one that instantly lent itself to a particular style of game. In fact, while a platform game seems like the most logical

» Mario isn't entirely reliant on the FLUDD, he can still jump, slide and pound the ground.

successor to *Super Mario 64*, Koizumi recalls the team looking in different directions to begin with. "When we were making prototypes, we were exploring the idea of a disaster recovery mission-style game. We experimented with a lot of different things before we switched over to making it a platform action game," the director explains. "It was a challenge coming up with ways to include new elements (like having people) without it seeming odd."

Wait, "people" in a Mario game? That's right – and you can see this for yourself. When the game was revealed at Nintendo's Spaceworld show in 2001, a trailer was shown in which a young girl is seen in the background. The game was also set to use a new form of coin, the Sol Coin, which could be spent – something not usually done with the coins of the Mushroom Kingdom. A clue as to what they could be spent on lies in the unused data on the game disc, which contains messages relating to a train system that Mario could purchase tickets for. This doesn't appear in the final game, as Mario instead travels via warp points, like in *Mario 64*.

In fact, examining this first trailer is fascinating, because very little of what is shown in it made it to the final game. The island setting, Mario's moves and

BRIGHTEST SHINES

THERE ARE 120 SHINES TO COLLECT IN SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE – THESE ARE FIVE OF THE MOST MEMORABLE...

GLOOPER BLOOPER BREAKS OUT

RICCO HARBOUR

■ This is a memorable and pretty early boss fight. Our big inky friend wants to spray his goop everywhere, so Mario needs to use FLUDD to clean it up. Then he'll need to pull off the Blooper's tentacles one by one (how violent!), before tugging at its mouth in order to deal damage.

EELY-MOUTH'S DENTIST

RICCO HARBOUR

■ There's horrible pollution all over Eely-Mouth's teeth, and it's Mario's job (now dabbling in dentistry) to give them a good pressure clean. How? First you need to dive into the polluted waters of Noki Bay, then use the hover nozzle to blast water downwards. Just be sure not to drown...

THE SECRET PACHINKO BOARD

DELFINO PLAZA

■ There's a boat in Delfino Plaza, which passes under a bridge before leaving for the wide open sea. Jump up into the bridge and you'll warp your way to this giant pachinko board. Mario himself is the ball here, and the plucky crimson-capped hero requires some guidance to collect the eight red coins here.

» This poor Chain Chomp is very hot, so Mario has to cool it down with FLUDD Isn't he nice?

» Other areas of the island can be seen from a distance in backgrounds, like Pinna Park and Ricco Harbour here.

» You can clear goop from above using FLUDD's hover nozzle – just don't fall into it!

"We felt that setting the game somewhere other than the Mushroom Kingdom would give us new ideas" Yoshiaki Koizumi

Sometimes, no matter how much you respect Nintendo, you wouldn't want to actually work there – thanks to its successes, there's an enormous weight of expectation attached to whatever the company does. Take *Mario*, for example: having delivered one of the best games of all time in the form of *Super Mario Bros. 3*, the company had to deliver a next-gen sequel worthy of the series for the SNES. It succeeded with *Super Mario World*, landing it in the same situation again – and the company still managed to deliver the goods. In fact, *Super Mario 64* was arguably more impressive than *Super Mario World*, as Nintendo had to master 3D game design and did it first time. So sure enough, when the GameCube made its way to market, Nintendo found itself in a familiar predicament once again.

How do you improve on a game that revolutionised an industry? The thrill of *Super Mario 64* was in the introduction of 3D environments, and the way in which Mario interacted with them. The team at Nintendo EAD would have to tackle both of those aspects of the game, and they chose to start with the environments. "I wanted to create expansive stages that would be worth exploring," says Yoshiaki Koizumi, who worked as the director of *Super Mario Sunshine*. "After *Super Mario 64*, I worked on *The Legend Of Zelda* games and I wanted to use the 3D game design knowledge I picked up from them in a *Mario* title."

This meant taking a different approach to stage design, even to the point of setting aside some *Mario* traditions. "When we were visualising what kind of world we'd want to explore, we felt that setting the game somewhere other than the Mushroom Kingdom – as we'd normally do – would give us some new ideas that we could make use of," explains Koizumi. "Another point we aimed for was to create a seamless space, where the stages are linked together by terrain." It's here that the *Zelda* influence becomes obvious – whereas *Super Mario 64* featured a series of abstract stages only loosely connected by a hub (that being Peach's castle), *Zelda*'s 3D environments are interconnected in such a way as to feel like a cohesive world. "I chose a tropical

Super Mario Sunshine™

» It's rare to see mirrors that look as good as this in games today, never mind 2002.

▶ graffiti Yoshi doesn't like water – he'll dissolve if he falls in – and he can shoot juice from his mouth, in a bizarre and sticky twist. However, you don't get a whole lot of opportunities to use Yoshi – he's present for the missions he needs to be in, but he's not found nearly as regularly as in a game like *Super Mario World*.

The anticipation for *Super Mario Sunshine* was palpable, and it's not surprising that the press dedicated huge reviews to the sequel to one of the biggest games ever. However, *Super Mario Sunshine* wasn't a game like *Super Mario 64*. It was bold in a different way – where *Super Mario 64* had to strike out a template for 3D platforming as a whole, *Super Mario Sunshine* had to play with that now-established wisdom, and, in many ways, buck Mario's usual trends. Structurally, this was a game much like *Super Mario 64*, but with messy and experimental innovations thrown in to keep things fresh. In short, this was an evolutionary game rather than a revolutionary game, and the difference still colours the reaction to *Super Mario Sunshine* today.

As you might have expected, *Super Mario Sunshine* launched to critical acclaim when it hit the streets of Japan in July 2002. As the localised releases followed over the next few months, the reviews stayed excellent. If you look at review aggregators today, the average score for the game is 92% – a staggering achievement that any developer would be proud of. NGC's Geraint Evans awarded the game 96% and declared that it was everything you would have wanted it to be, and IGN's 9.4/10 review noted it as being the best single-player game available for the GameCube. Even the often curmudgeonly *Edge*, while noting that the game wasn't quite as good as *Super Mario 64*, still offered the game 9/10 and, preceding Kanye West by some years, declared it "the second best platform game of all time. *Of all time*".

However, as astonishing as it might seem given the praise this indicates, it's clear that certain elements of the gaming press felt a tad let down by the game. Gamespot was probably the most outspoken – Jeff Gerstmann's 8/10 review found a number of points to criticise. "On its own merits, *Super Mario Sunshine* is a solid game with a really distinctive look and some great moments, but it also has its fair share of shortcomings," said the reviewer. "While some

"We removed FLUDD from the secret courses to add variation to the difficulty" Yoshiaki Koizumi

» Clearing goop off of pollution-spewing enemies is a remnant of an earlier concept.

> "When we were making prototypes, we were exploring the idea of a disaster recovery mission-style game" Yoshiaki Koizumi

the pollution theme are all more or less correct, but the maps and enemies on show never made it to the final game. Reports at the time state that Shigeru Miyamoto was opposed to the idea of having shown *Super Mario Sunshine* at Spaceworld 2001, such was the early state it was in, and had to be persuaded heavily in order to do so. But other than the obvious aspects of that trailer, there was one object that didn't go unnoticed but couldn't be explained. It was the presence of an odd backpack device on Mario that raised eyebrows at that event, and Nintendo was keeping its significance a secret at that time. The press described it as being like a jetpack, not knowing just how right they might be. With the benefit of hindsight, the presence of this device was proof that the early ideas were already giving way to something that was much closer to the final game design.

Mario's new tool was FLUDD – the Flash Liquidiser Ultra Dousing Device, according to its inventor Professor E Gadd. The device could rapidly store and discharge water, allowing it to perform a variety of functions of both offensive and defensive utility. "We thought that making playing with water the theme of the game would make this tropical world even more fun," Koizumi recalls. It was certainly a shrewd move, as Mario gained a family-friendly weapon. What's more, on a tropical island setting there should have been plenty of thematically appropriate opportunities to work water sources into stage design.

"In an early prototype, the player wasn't searching for Shine Sprites, and instead the story was set on an island that was slowly being polluted by enemies," Koizumi reveals. "The idea was that you'd wash the pollution away with FLUDD and also use it to defeat the boss enemy, the source of the pollution." Looking at the very first trailer for the game, you can see this idea in action – enemies spreading pollution are clearly present, and there's a gigantic enemy roaming about the place. But, as familiar as this sounds, such gameplay only makes up a portion of what's actually in *Super Mario Sunshine*. "A part of this was left in the game in the form of cleaning off graffiti to defeat enemies, or save people," says Koizumi. "Ultimately we decided to switch the theme to the platforming action you see now, and when we did so, we removed some of the FLUDD abilities and whittled them down to four."

Cutting back on FLUDD's functions might not have been a bad idea, as the device certainly takes a major role in *Super Mario Sunshine*. In fact, in a weird way, it's possible to describe FLUDD as the star of the ▶

THE SECRET OF THE VILLAGE UNDERSIDE

PIANTA VILLAGE

■ This task reveals a whole different side to the village – you'll need to get underneath it with Yoshi to find the entrance to a secret stage. Once you're there, Shadow Mario will steal FLUDD, and you'll rely on strong Piantas to throw you between platforms.

THE SAND BIRD IS BORN

GELATO BEACH

■ Don't you know about the bird? Everybody knows about the bird. If you can make your way into the broken egg in the tower on Gelato Beach, you'll be transported to atop the Sand Bird. Your goal is to collect eight red coins without falling off, which is harder than it sounds as it occasionally decides to rotate 90 degrees.

» The scale of some enemies in *Super Mario Sunshine* is terrifying – look at this Big Wiggler!

build the stages so users were free to choose their own route to move through them – for example, by running around on the roofs of buildings and so on," says Koizumi. This recognises one of the fundamental joys of *Super Mario 64*, which was seeing how you could get into odd places – for example, on top of Peach's castle in the hub world. Nintendo rewarded that exploratory spirit in *Super Mario 64*, and it would do so again in *Super Mario Sunshine* – even in the hub world. While some of the level entrances in Delfino Plaza are nice, ground-level portals, there's more to discover – you've got to find a warp pipe on top of a building to get to Sirena Beach, for example.

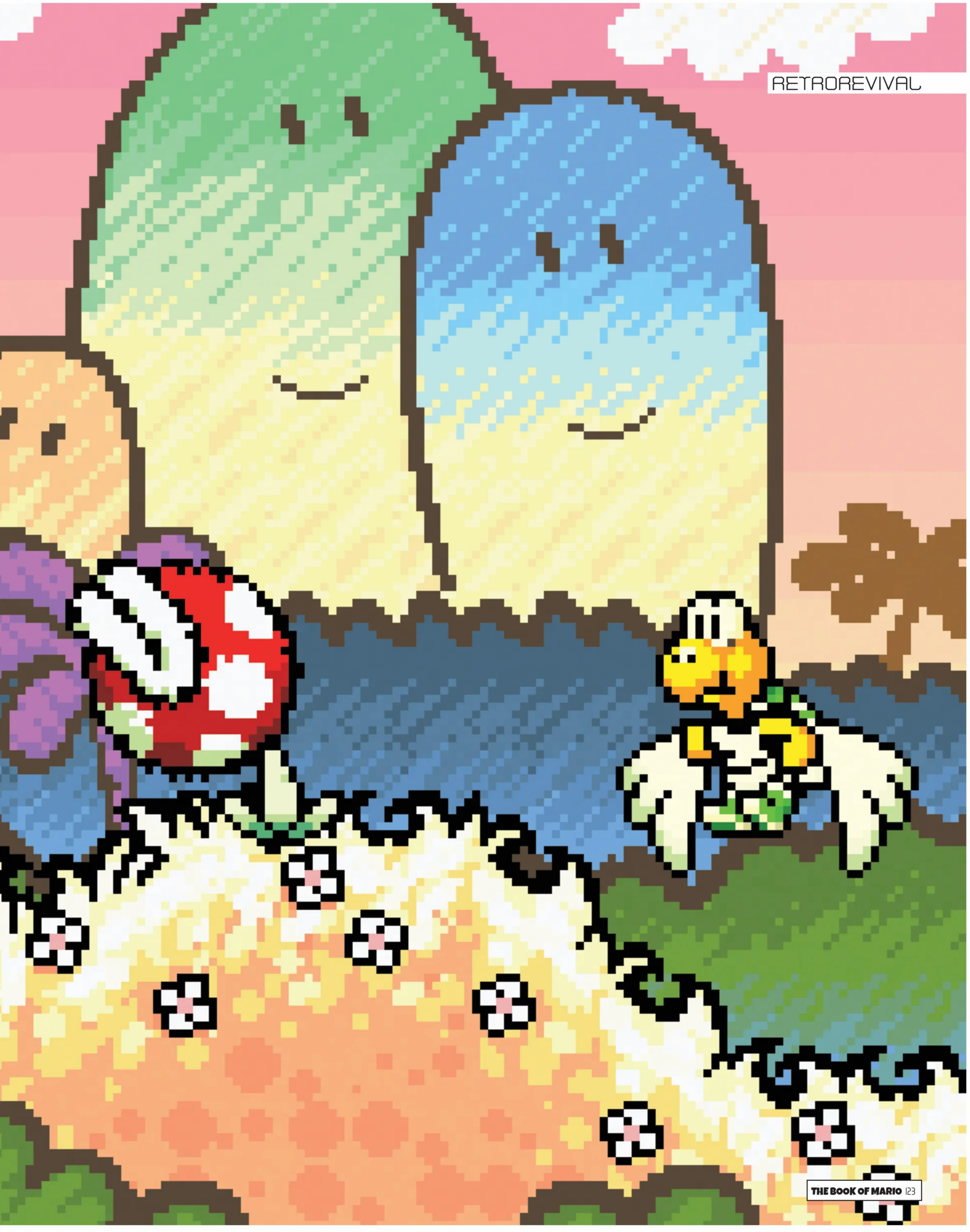
However, there was a danger that players would fail to map out the new, larger spaces in their heads – one that the team was fully aware of. "When designing open stages, you have to consider that if the player doesn't have a way to tell where they are in the stage, they can easily get lost," Koizumi tells us. "In *Super Mario Sunshine*, we put large landmarks in the stages, so players could move around using those as indicators of their position." With that concern dealt with, the team was free to populate these larger stages with fun things to do. "We decided to create multiple missions that took advantages of the space," Koizumi continues. "We designed the stages so that not only did they have a main goal, but you could also reach sub courses, and of course we also included collectables like Blue Coins and so on."

The courses in *Super Mario Sunshine* certainly do add more in the way of additional subcourses, as compared to *Super Mario 64* – Sirena Beach has the whole hotel interior of course, and there are one-shot extras like the Sand Bird's tower on Gelato Beach. But the biggest and most prominent addition of extra courses comes in the secret stages. Unlike the main stages, these are exercises in pure platforming and they're typically pretty abstract – while all the game's main courses are rooted in believable tropical island locations, the secret stages are floating in midair with bizarre backgrounds. The most interesting thing about them, though, is that they tend to leave you without one of the game's biggest distinguishing points by taking away FLUDD. "We removed FLUDD from the secret courses because we wanted to add some variation to the difficulty," recalls Koizumi. "The advantages of FLUDD are its ability to let you make low-gravity jumps. Put the other way, by removing FLUDD it makes the jumping more challenging!" Indeed – some of *Sunshine*'s most challenging stages are those in which you haven't got FLUDD.

"We designed the stages so that not only did they have a main goal, but you could also reach subcourses" Yoshiaki Koizumi

With all of the attention on FLUDD, there's actually a returning character that people tend to forget about when *Super Mario Sunshine* is discussed – good old Yoshi, who had by this point become a star outside of the *Mario* series, thanks to games like *Yoshi's Island* and *Yoshi's Story*. "Yoshi appeared as a guest character in *Super Mario 64* as well, but you couldn't play as him. So in *Super Mario Sunshine* we wanted to add Yoshi as a playable character you can ride on," says Koizumi. This was the first game since Yoshi was introduced in *Super Mario World* where Yoshi could be ridden by Mario as he was in that first appearance, and he was a bit different. But as it turns out, there's a reason for that according to Koizumi: "Well, strictly speaking, it's just a graffiti version in this game, and not the actual Yoshi!"

As always, Yoshi hatches from an egg, but in this game he'll only respond to the presence of the various fruits scattered throughout each stage. Once you tempt him out with the correct treat, Yoshi is as faithful a companion as ever – he'll put the extra effort in and struggle at the end of a jump to grab you some extra air time, he'll whip enemies into his awaiting mouth with his incredibly lengthy tongue, and he even adds an extra drum track to the music, just as he did in *Super Mario World*. But this



THE HISTORY OF NEW

SUPER MARIO BROS.

IT'S BEEN MORE THAN A DECADE SINCE NINTENDO RELAUNCHED ITS 2D SUPER MARIO SERIES ON THE NINTENDO DS. WE LOOK BACK AT THE FRANCHISE THAT GAVE THE FAMOUS MUSHROOM-CHOMPING MASCOT A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

BEST WORLDS

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS: WORLD 7-3

It might not be the most exciting or challenging world in *New Super Mario Bros*, but the fact that it contains a giant, rideable Wiggler makes it pretty memorable. This large creature is one of the many ways the designers made use of the DS's 3D capabilities.

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS WII: WORLD 7-2

This ethereal, dream-like stage is packed with floating bubbles into which you can jump and swim. You'll need to use these unlikely methods of transport to make your way safely through a level swarming with Chain Chomps and Bullet Bills.

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS 2: GOLD CLASSICS COIN RUSH

This isn't a level as such but one of *New Super Mario Bros 2*'s best Coin Rush packs. It's paid-for DLC, but worth every penny – classic stages from past entries are re-tooled for the coin-collecting gameplay of this 3DS sequel. A first step into the world of DLC for Nintendo.

NEW SUPER LUIGI U: SUPERSTAR ROAD-3

One of the later levels in the game, this is set aboard a haunted shipwreck where our hero Luigi is stalked by a hungry Cheep Chomp. There's plenty of challenge on offer as a result, but you can use your ravenous foe to deal with other enemies if you're savvy enough.

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS U: WORLD 7 – AIRSHIP

Airship levels have been part of the Mario series since *Super Mario Bros 3*, but this one is unique in that it takes place outside of a floating fortress. You come under attack from above and below, which makes for an exciting dash to victory.

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS U: WORLD 5-4

Looking like some sort of possessed, demonic painting, this level is a dazzling visual spectacle complete with a creepy painting of Bowser himself which glares malevolently down at you when you reach the end of the stage. Spooky, but tons of fun.

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS WII: WORLD 6 – TOWER

This fortress stage is unique with its massive drill that constantly appears in the middle of the level, creating palpable moments of tension as you judge when to make your leaps and jumps. When playing with friends there's obvious scope for skulduggery here.

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS: WORLD 6-6

Climbing this Chain Chomp-infested mountain is the only time the iconic enemy appears in *New Super Mario Bros*, but it's such a fun stage to tackle that we'll forgive Nintendo for not making more of the spherical foe elsewhere in the game.

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS 2: WORLD 2-1

Some of the best stages in Mario games are ones where you're introduced to a new item or power-up, and this is a classic example. The Gold Flower turns blocks into coins, and World 2-1 is where you get to experiment with its power for the first time.

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS 2: WORLD 6-2

Lava levels have a long and proud tradition in the Mario series, and this offering from *New Super Mario Bros 2* is one of the most notable. All the usual hazards are in place, but the fact you're riding through much of the level on a creepy Spine Coaster gives it that additional kick.

BEST POWER-UPS

BLUE KOOPA SHELL

Introduced in *New Super Mario Bros*, this turns the player into a shell-wearing warrior who can duck for cover and perform the Shell Dash.

MINI MUSHROOM

These makes the player small enough to enter tiny warp pipes and run across water, but a single hit from an enemy will be able to kill you.

MEGA MUSHROOM

The Mega Mushroom makes the player temporarily increase in size, trashing everything within the level – right down to the end flagpole!

PENGUIN SUIT

This comes in handy on ice levels – it gives you increased traction, you can throw ice balls and you'll swim more gracefully underwater.

ICE FLOWER

First seen in *Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time*, the Ice Flower allows the player to freeze enemies – the opposite of the iconic Fire Flower.

STARMAN

This power-up is granted a new side-effect – coins are dropped as you dash through the level. Your running speed is also increased.

SUPER LEAF

Another fan-favourite, the Super Leaf becomes one of the more vital pick-ups in *New Super Mario Bros 2*. Luigi's suit is a kitsune-themed outfit called Fox Luigi.

INVINCIBILITY LEAF

Like the Super Leaf, but with invincibility. You can obtain the leaf from an Assist Block after losing **five consecutive lives in any level.**

GOLD FLOWER

Introduced in New Super Mario Bros. 2, these flowers transform you into a gold statue that can hurl golden fireballs **at enemies and blocks.**

SQUIRREL SUIT

Collecting the Super Acorn in ***New Super Mario Bros U*** turns the player into a Flying Squirrel, with the ability to jump higher and cling to vertical surfaces. Your spin jump is also given extra height with **this outfit.**

» Let's hope that Yoshi doesn't break wind any time soon…

Contributing to a worldwide total of coins was quite a unique move for a company as historically reluctant to the online revolution as Nintendo, and the game's superb Coin Rush mode gave this new approach added appeal. In this mode, the player had to collect as many coins as possible on a single life through three randomly selected levels. A pure score-chasing exercise, Coin Rush allowed players to challenge friends or strangers by transmitting their best scores via StreetPass connectivity, a system which exchanges information between consoles close enough to connect wirelessly. Arguably the stand-out element of the entire package, Coin Rush fever was fed by the release of additional downloadable level packs, a first for the company. It also represented a wise move on Nintendo's part, especially given the lukewarm critical reception the game was afforded by some media outlets, who felt that although it was clearly a good game, it didn't evolve the concept enough when compared to the previous two instalments. In terms of sales, *New Super Mario Bros 2* didn't reach the same heights as it forerunners, and as of September 2017 has sold 12.43 million copies worldwide – still a remarkable achievement, but less than half of what both *New Super Mario Bros* and *New Super Mario Bros Wii* managed; the smaller install base of the 3DS when compared to both the DS and Wii no doubt being a factor.

Developed alongside the 3DS sequel was Mario's first entry into the world of high-definition visuals: *New Super Mario Bros U.* A launch title for Nintendo's ultimately divisive Wii U home system, it had been unveiled at E3 2011 as a tech demo under the moniker New Super Mario Bros Mii. Aside from the gorgeous HD visuals, the game's unique hook was the way it exploited the Wii U's GamePad controller; up to five players could join the action, but the person using the GamePad had no control over any of the on-screen protagonists. Instead, they used the controller's resistive touchscreen display to aid the other players. With the GamePad player stunning enemies or placing blocks to assist the others, Nintendo's dream of asymmetrical gaming was fulfilled; a feature which was particularly attractive to parents who wanted to help their novice offspring get through the game's multitude of increasingly tricky levels, which are linked together on a massive overworld map like in the SNES classic *Super Mario World*. Another big selling point was the fact that the game could be played entirely using the GamePad, without any need for a TV – a hardware feature that was unique to Nintendo's console at the time. Elsewhere, new character Nabbit would appear on certain levels, forcing the player to give chase – catching the mischievous thief resulted in a power-up reward.

» The power of the Wii U allowed for some incredible level design.

» The Flying Squirrel suit added yet another wrinkle to the core Mario gameplay.

» Consuming a Mega Mushroom allows Mario to stomp through levels.

When Mario made the jump into three dimensions with 1996's seminal *Super Mario 64*, it marked a considerable step forward not just for the world-famous character, but for the entire platforming genre. Shigeru Miyamoto's legendary creation had been almost single-handedly charting the course of 2D platformers since the Eighties, inspiring hordes of copycat titles that cloned Mario's unique abilities but rarely managed to accurately capture the charm and playability of Nintendo's sterling offerings. Sequels such as the iconic *Super Mario Bros 3* on NES and the evolutionary *Super Mario World* on SNES established the popular Italian plumber as the genre's leading light despite pressure from rivals such as Sonic, Bonk and Alex Kidd. When he finally shed his 2D past and took on his shiny new 3D mantle, it was almost a given that the rest of the industry would dutifully follow suit. 2D platformers became passé almost overnight once *Super Mario 64* hit store shelves, and titles like *Crash Bandicoot*, *Sonic Adventure*, *Croc: Legend of the Gobbos* and *Spyro the Dragon* all subsequently attempted to tiptoe in Mario's famous footsteps.

Fast forward to 2004, and the playing field was a very different one. Gamers had, to a degree, experienced their fill of 3D platformers after a flood of Mario clones saturated the market. A new generation of players – both young and old – were about to hop on board thanks to the astonishing market penetration of the Nintendo DS and Wii, and given that the last 2D mainline Super Mario game was 1995's *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*, it stands to reason that many of the character's new-found fans wouldn't have even played one of his vintage 2D exploits. This made a return to his roots a daring and exciting prospect, and at E3 2004 Nintendo lifted the curtain on *New Super Mario Bros*, a traditional platforming adventure in which Mario was once again restricted to just two planes of movement – albeit one which made good use of modern 3D character models.

Despite its steadfast 2D sensibilities, *New Super Mario Bros* was not a return to the pixel-rich hand-drawn aesthetic of old – but this came with added benefits. Models could now be animated more fluidly, giving them increased personality; memorably, enemies actually reacted to the music, jumping in the air at specific points in each level's soundtrack. Elsewhere, environmental features such as rope bridges strained realistically under Mario's weight, lending the Mushroom Kingdom a sense of authenticity that had, up to this point, been exclusive to Mario's 3D adventures. However, it would be the power-ups – which made use of the Nintendo DS's modest 3D capabilities – that had the most impact; consuming a Mega Mushroom would cause Mario to balloon in size, filling the screen and demolishing scenery and enemies alike.

This transition was accomplished smoothly because the character model was rendered entirely in 3D.

While a small handful of critics expressed dismay at Nintendo's perceived reliance on past glories with *New Super Mario Bros*, the overall reception was positive, and fans voted with their wallets at launch. Almost half a million copies were sold in Japan on launch day, and after four days on sale 900,000 units had been hungrily snapped up, making it – at the time – the best debut for a Nintendo DS game in that region. Over in North America, the news was

» With the Blue Koopa Shell, the player can Shell Dash to defeat a row of enemies.

Yoshi's Island: Super Mario Advance 3

WORLD'S BEST BABYSITTING GIG

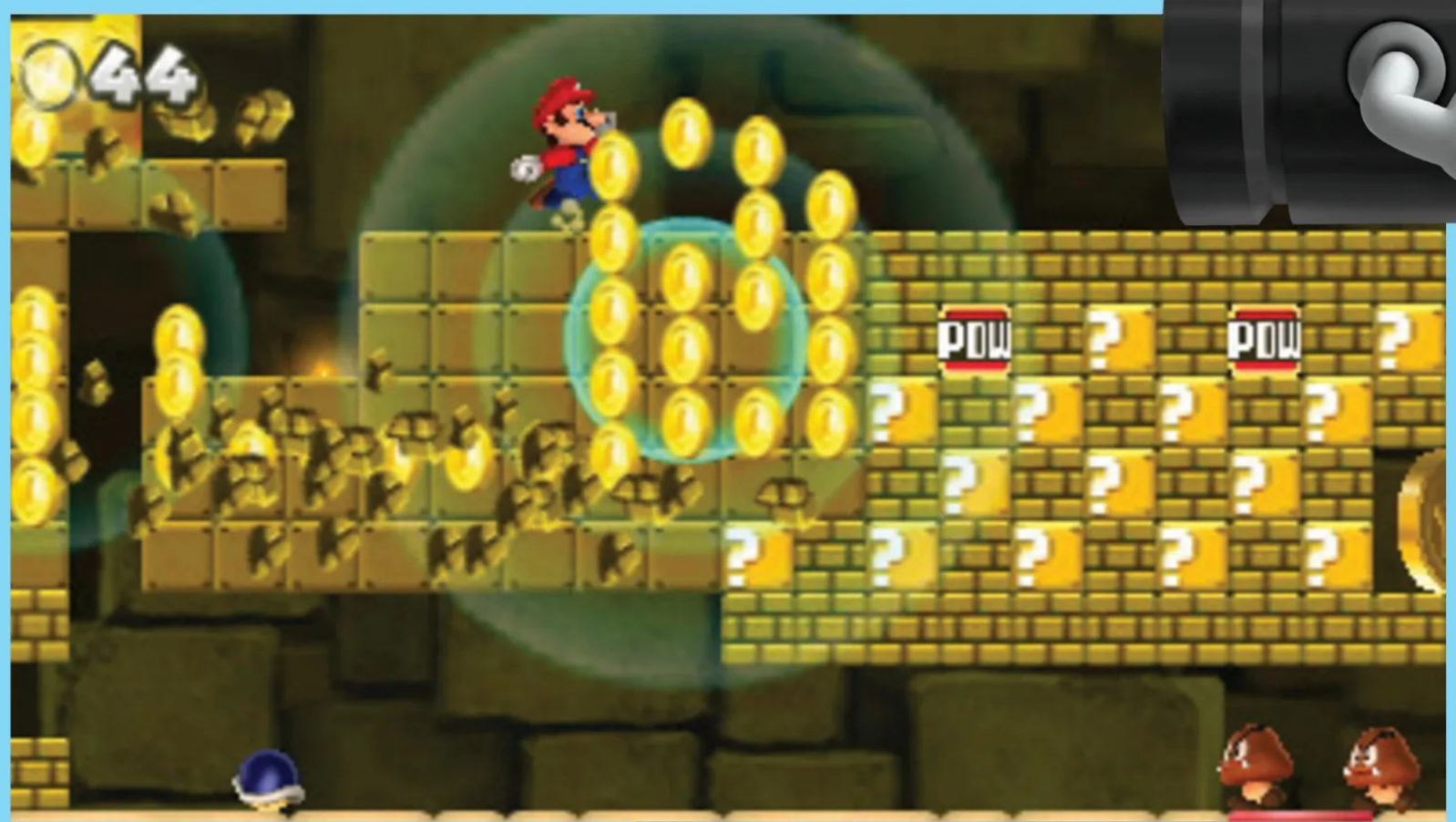
» GAME BOY ADVANCE » 2002 » NINTENDO

I've always had a soft spot for Yoshi. It's not because he's an adorable green dinosaur. It's not because his name derives from the Japanese interjection, meaning 'great'. And it's not even because he bears a striking resemblance to gaming's greatest hero of all, Croc. It's because of this game.

I never had a SNES so the original release of *Yoshi's Island* passed me by, but I fell in love with it's Game Boy Advance reissue almost instantly. The storybook art style, the fun levels and the wide array of obstacles Yoshi faces add up to make one of the best games either the SNES or GBA has to offer.

And on the back of the game's opening cinematic, how could you not think the world of Yoshi? A child falls from the sky quite unexpectedly, and our knight in shining armour (well, just boots really) is willing to risk life and limb to reunite a baby would-be plumber with his brother – no questions asked. That tells you all you need to know about Yoshi really.

Were it not for Yoshi and his colourful clan of Yoshies (realising that he is a Yoshi called Yoshi blew my 11-year-old mind) babysitting Mario all those years ago, everyone's favourite red-capped hero probably wouldn't be around today to stop Bowser time and time again. So who's the *real* hero of the *Super Mario* saga? ✱



» A typically coin-soaked scene from *New Super Mario Bros 2*

just as encouraging; 500,000 copies made their way into the hands of eager gamers in the first month, rising to one million after twelve weeks. As of March 2016, *New Super Mario Bros* has sold a staggering 30.8 million copies, making it the best-selling Nintendo DS game of all time.

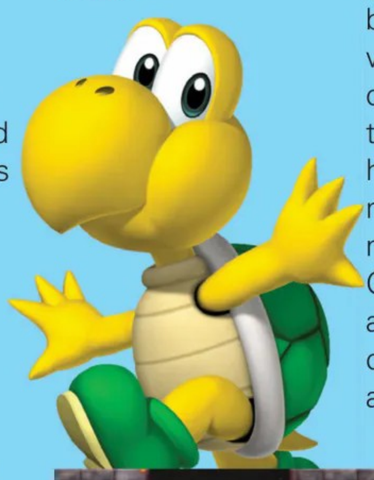
The commercial performance of *New Super Mario Bros* essentially turned this interesting experiment with the past into a valid sub-series of the Super Mario franchise, and a sequel was of course inevitable. Rather than just produce a second game for the DS, Nintendo instead chose to shift the series over to its equally successful Wii home console. The promise of increased graphical power would have no doubt been a factor in this decision, but it was reported at the time that Miyamoto's desire to make the Super Mario series more cooperative and social also played a significant role; Nintendo had experimented with multiplayer in *Super Mario 64 DS* and 2009's *New Super Mario Bros Wii* could be seen as the next logical step. Up to four players could participate simultaneously, a feature which – in the **Retro Gamer** office, at least – paved the way for some particularly hilarious post-pub multiplayer sessions.

In typical Nintendo style, even this new multiplayer option was beautifully balanced to avoid any frustration when playing with less-skilled companions. Those who lagged behind would be dragged forward if they

failed to catch up, while death didn't always mean Game Over – if a player lost a life but had at least one more left in reserve, they became encased inside a bubble which could be popped by another player, allowing them to rejoin. However, perhaps the most dramatic concession was the introduction of the Super Guide feature, designed to prevent inexperienced players from being disheartened by the game's trickier sections. The mode was only deployed in the single-player campaign, and if a player died eight times in a row a green exclamation block appeared which permitted an AI Luigi to show the safe path through the stage; at any point the player could regain control and pick up where Luigi left off. It was also possible for the player to allow Luigi to finish the stage completely and then either replay it from the start or progress to the next level. Predictably, this mode was criticised by some series veterans for taking hand-holding to the next level, but it was only there as an optional choice – and by including it, Nintendo made the game more accessible to casual players, a fact which undoubtedly contributed to its amazing success.

» ABOVE Sometimes you had to put complete trust in your fellow players.

» BELOW: Like all good Mario games, there are plenty of classic fortress stages for you to master.



» On Wii, the series was given a strong multiplayer focus which saw players helping – or hindering – one another.

With the commercial momentum of its DS predecessor and the astonishing adoption rate of the Wii itself, *New Super Mario Bros Wii* was an outstanding performer for Nintendo. In Japan, 936,734 units were retailed in the first four days alone, the biggest debut for a Wii game on Nintendo's home soil. The following week, total sales jumped to 1,401,558, and after seven weeks it crossed the three million marker. North American sales were just as striking; 1,390,000 units were sold in November alone. As of September 30th, 2017, *New Super Mario Bros Wii* has sold 30.11 million copies worldwide. Such was the popularity of *New Super Mario Bros Wii* that Capcom adapted it for arcades with 2011's *New Super Mario Bros Wii Coin World*; the multiplayer focus remained in place, but the objective was to win events to collect keys, with five keys earning a shot at signature bad guy Bowser. More recently, the game has been given a new lease of life in China, where it is available to download on the Nvidia Shield – an Android-based micro-console made by the same hardware manufacturer that produces the chips for the Nintendo Switch.

By the time the new decade rolled around, Nintendo had a new handheld challenger on the market: the Nintendo 3DS. It would be a 3D game which would give Mario his debut on this new-fangled handheld, with 2011's *Super Mario 3D Land* superbly taking advantage of the lessons learned from past adventures to create a wonderfully playable romp with excellent auto-stereoscopic visuals. However, this didn't mean that the 'New' series was coming to an end; in fact, the following year saw the release of the next entry on the 3DS in the form of *New Super Mario Bros 2*. By far the biggest news with this instalment was the fact that coins were given more emphasis than in any other title before, or indeed, since. Each coin acquired would be added to a running total, and the console's online capabilities allowed the player to upload their coin score to a combined global haul for all players. With this in mind, several new items were added which allowed for much greater coin consumption, such as the Gold Flower which turned blocks into coins and the famous Coin Block mask which, once collected, would produce a stream of coinage as the player traversed the level.

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

MULTIPLAYER

Shigeru Miyamoto always wanted to make the Mario series a social event, and with *New Super Mario Bros Wii*, he finally got his chance. Romping through the Mushroom Kingdom with three like-minded mates is so much fun that it perhaps should come with a government health warning.

3D GAME ENGINE

Previous 2D Mario games used a tile-based graphics engine which limited the imagination of the designers; by shifting to a 3D engine – but keeping the action 2D – *New Super Mario Bros* enabled the developers to run riot with their ideas. Environmental elements were no longer restricted by 2D design and could be manipulated in 3D space; likewise, Mario could grow in size smoothly and convincingly.

NEW MODES

New Super Mario Bros 2's Coin Rush mode was so addictive that it could have been released as a stand-alone game and it still would have sold by the truckload. The genius is that it took a straightforward element of the franchise – coin collecting – and turned it into a social high score challenge using the 3DS console's StreetPass feature.

SUPER GUIDE

Love it or loathe it, the Super Guide feature introduced in *New Super Mario Bros Wii* will have created a whole new generation of fans. By helping newcomers negotiate trickier levels, the Super Guide helped avoid novices from becoming downhearted or frustrated by their lack of progress.

ONLINE CONNECTIVITY

The competitive element of *New Super Mario Bros 2*'s Coin Rush mode is amplified by the fact you can not only challenge nearby players to beat your score via StreetPass, but you're also contributing to a global total – which gives you further incentive to collect as many coins as possible.

As the first Mario title to accompany a hardware launch in some time, *New Super Mario Bros U* made quite an impression on critics hungry to get their hands on the Wii U and its software. The initial response was incredibly positive, and seeing Mario enter the world of HD was a striking moment for everyone. However, there were some voices of dissent who pointed out that while it looked amazing and made good use of the GamePad, the game hardly represented the quantum leap many expected from a Mario title spearheading a new hardware cycle. With GamePad functionality stripped away, this was essentially recycling ideas established by other games in the sub-series. Even so, Mario's brand power was not up for dispute, and *New Super Mario Bros U* ended up shifting 5.75 million copies – that might not sound like much when compared to its series siblings, but when you consider that only 13.56 million Wii U consoles have been sold as of March 2017, it represents an impressive attach rate. The game sold around the same number of copies as *Super Mario 3D World*, the Wii U's other big Mario outing, but both are eclipsed by *Mario Kart 8*, which has shifted 8.40 million copies to date – making it the Wii U's most successful piece of software.

2013 was declared by Nintendo as "The Year of Luigi" because his first appearance was 30 years previous in *Mario Bros* (his more illustrious brother made his debut two years earlier, in 1981's *Donkey Kong*). Alongside *Luigi's Mansion: Dark Moon* and *Mario & Luigi: Dream Team* on the 3DS, Nintendo announced *New Super Luigi U*, an expansion to *New Super Mario Bros U* in which the taller Mario Brother is the star. The levels were designed to accommodate Luigi's higher jumps and floatier style, while Nabbit – one of the original game's baddies – was elevated to the role of playable character. The game was notable for offering a more challenging experience, with a tighter time limit imposed to ratchet up the tension and keep the player moving. Released as a paid-for DLC expansion, a stand-alone retail release and as part of a double-pack with the original game, *New Super Luigi U* was a modest commercial success for Nintendo, selling just over three million copies. It is, at the time of writing, the most recent game in the 'New' sub-series.

The future of this series remains unclear; the last major Mario platformer to utilise 2D visuals was 2015's *Super Mario Maker* on the Wii U, which allowed players to create levels based on templates from *New Super Mario Bros U*. The game was later ported to the Nintendo 3DS in 2016, but the company's latest console – the best-selling Switch – was blessed with a 3D Mario game in the shape of *Super Mario Odyssey* last year. With its massive open levels and strong emphasis on exploration, *Odyssey* could be seen as a fresh new start for the character, and it's tempting to speculate on Nintendo's reluctance to return to the comparatively simplistic template of the 'New' sub-series, despite its commercial clout. However, the world's most famous video game hero is not only a master of innovation – he's also an expert at taking old ideas and dressing them up in a way that makes them feel unique and groundbreaking, so only a fool would entirely write off seeing another 2D Mario outing in the near future. In fact, we'd be willing to bet Nintendo is already working on something for Switch as we speak…

» BELOW: The lush environments in *New Super Mario Bros U* make it one of the best-looking 2D platformers to date.

Special thanks to Super Mario Wiki [www.mariowiki.com] for allowing us to reproduce their level screenshots throughout this feature.

Super Mario Galaxy 2

PROOF THAT DARRAN IS 100% CORRECT

» WII » 2010 » NINTENDO

The Wii completely passed me by. At the time I was more interested in the brown and cloud-grey coloured games on the PS3 starring bulky white dudes with shaved heads. In hindsight, I was a bit of an idiot; I missed out on a whole library of vibrant and awesome games, like *Super Mario Galaxy 2*.

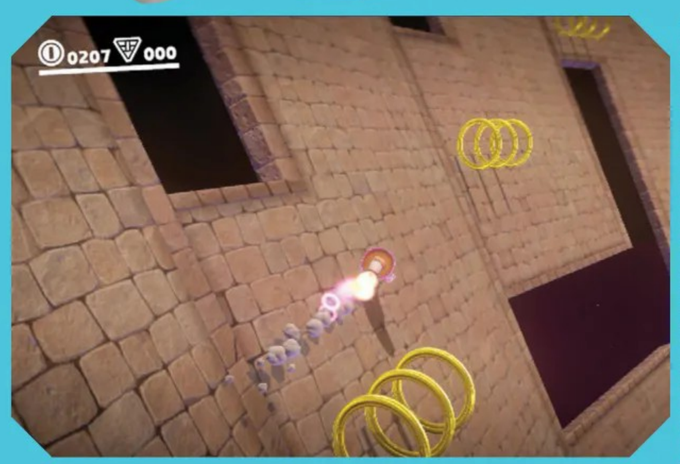
I didn't realise *Super Mario Galaxy* had a full sequel on the Wii – it's something out of character for Nintendo, and it surprised me, as its modus operandi is that it only produces one 3D Mario per generation. It was when I first started on **Retro Gamer** that I learned of its existence. Darran proudly told me he awarded the game a 100% score in his review, because it was the best game of its type at the time. I doubted him, of course. I thought that there was no game on planet Earth deserving of a 100% score, it's just something you don't do as a reviewer. Again, I was channelling Idiot Drew.

I finally got round to experiencing *Super Mario Galaxy 2* in 2017, just before *Super Mario Odyssey* came out, and boy is it a treat. It's not often you experience something that makes you grin like a goofy idiot for the entire duration you spend time with it, but I'm certain that *Galaxy 2* left some permanent wrinkles on my face from where I was smiling so much.

I think this was the game where I finally 'got' the magic of Mario. I enjoy Mario games, don't get me wrong, but they've just felt like good games to me. Playing *Galaxy 2* kind of felt like swallowing sunshine. It's so infectiously upbeat that it's simply impossible to not enjoy.

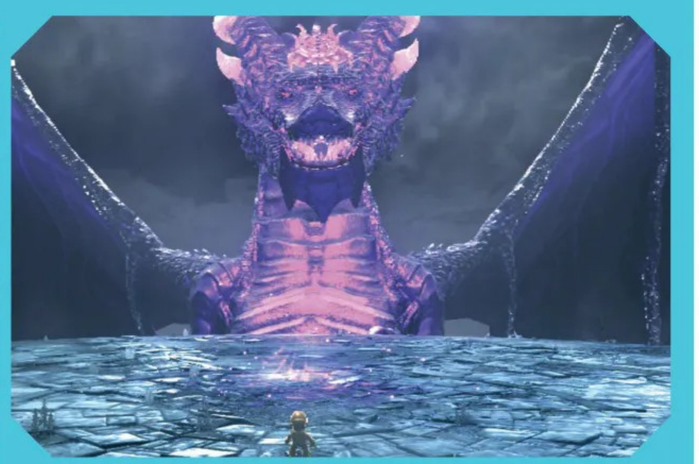
Mario's latest adventure, *Odyssey*, shows that Nintendo is still on top of its game when it comes to Mario, but I think I prefer *Galaxy 2*. I'm a sucker for anything to do with space, for starters, and I prefer the creative upside-down level design and bosses. Oh and Yoshi is used a lot more in this one, and more Yoshi is always a good idea.

SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY™



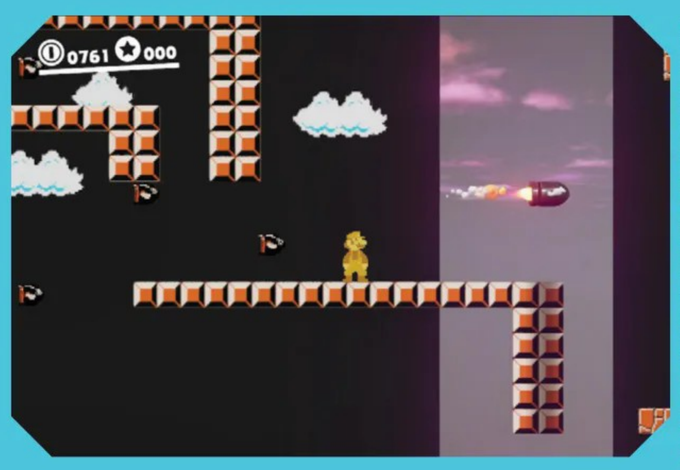
SINKING COLOSSAL RUINS (SAND KINGDOM #87)

Okay, this one is really tough. Grab Rocket Flowers and control a speeding Mario over a narrow pathway, and then along a tilted wall. Avoid the gaps and get to the end to grab the moon.



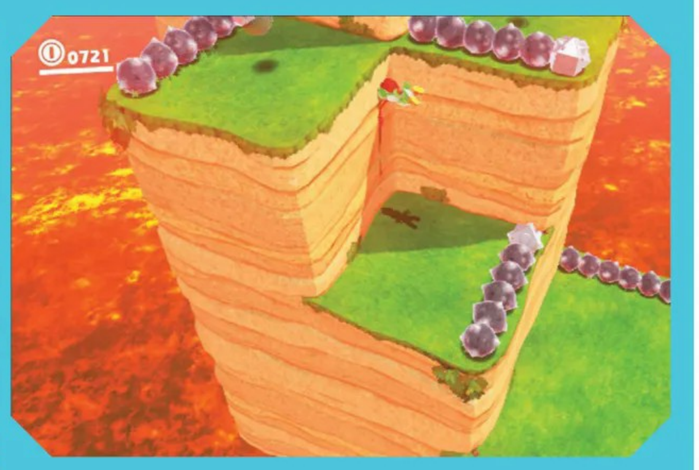
BATTLE WITH THE LORD OF LIGHTNING (RUINED KINGDOM #1)

No Mario boss has been as big as the Lord Of Lightning. This enormous dragon will fire beams of electricity at you until you knock him down and pound the weak spot on his head.



SECRET 2D TREASURE (MUSHROOM KINGDOM #31)

Prepare your best curse words, folks, because this level will make you swear. The challenge here is to stay within the 2D sections – pop out and you'll become 3D again… and fall to instant death.



FRUIT FEAST ON THE SINKING ISLAND (DARK SIDE #12)

Grabbing the fruit is the aim of this level, and as the platform sinks there isn't much time to get it all. Fast reactions and copious use of Yoshi's sticky tongue are essential to succeed here.

A TRADITIONAL FESTIVAL (METRO KINGDOM #7)

The ultimate retro celebration, this 2D level shows Jumpman some love, and features some of the coolest music and platforming of the entire game. A fantastic finale to the Metro Kingdom.

SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY SECRETS

2D OUTFITS

If you wear a full outfit and enter a 2D section, you'll get to see how 8-bit Mario could've looked if he'd been a scientist, a caveman or a samurai. Make sure you're wearing the hat that matches the costume though, or it won't work.

NAME THAT TUNE

Bounce on the Odyssey's globe and you'll hear one of two music box tunes. If you haven't completed the game yet you'll hear the trailer theme for the game, but if you've defeated Bowser you'll get to listen to the catchy *Jump Up, Superstar*.

HIDDEN COINS

The development team placed coins in hard-to-reach areas to reward players that are willing to go that extra mile to find them. If you can see a surface, you can probably reach it, and getting there will normally nab you some cash.

ON THE NOSE

Leave Mario standing still for a while and he'll sit down to rest. Leave him longer and he'll drop off to sleep – and if you're lucky you might see a bird land on his nose. The bird is different in every kingdom!

YOU LOOK FAMILIAR

You might recognise some of Mario's outfits from previous games or adverts. For example, the scientist outfit is from a 1995 Super Game Boy commercial, while the Golf outfit appeared in *NES Open Tournament Golf* in 1991.

HIGH FIVE?

When you get a moon, Mario will do one of three hand-gestures, all of which refer back to previous games. The 'peace' sign appeared in *Mario 64*, an open palm featured in *Mario Sunshine*, and a closed fist is *Mario Galaxy*'s hallmark.

SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY

Mario could kick enemies in *Mario 64*, shoot water at them in *Sunshine*, and perform a spin attack in *Galaxy*, making the act of defeating a simple Goomba that much easier. This time around, a hat throw does the job – and if it doesn't, you'll either stun the enemy, or have the opportunity to take control of it.

And at last, we reach the main reason that *Odyssey* is so unique. The possession powers that Mario has not only gives use to a massive selection of new abilities to explore, it makes us smile while doing it. There are no power-ups in this game – Mario can't throw fireballs, glide around the level or grow taller this time around. Instead, all of these abilities (and many more) are available through the creatures (and sometimes items) he encounters. In every case, this means that the player needs to understand a new skill set instantly, be ready to use it, and be ready to lose it almost immediately – possibly never to see it again. On-screen tutorials are a necessity, then, but Nintendo has been careful to keep each power simple. This is a Mario game, after all.

All of these new abilities (and there are a whole bunch of them to find – see some of our favourites in Possession Powers), and the fact that the hat quickly becomes the primary mode of interaction with the world, means that the levels where you're left without it are particularly rough. Throwing your hat onto scarecrows will offer platforming challenges, while end-game moons will require you to replay particularly challenging sections, only without Cappy. We can't count the number of times we tried to throw him to perform a long-jump over a gap, grabbed empty air, and subsequently plummeted to our death. Challenges like this have been a hallmark of Mario games – especially *Sunshine* – where your core tool is taken and you're forced to rely on your platforming skills alone. There are only a few games that give you the same sense of accomplishment as when you finish one of those levels with a perfect run.

Perhaps the biggest diversion from the Mario formula this time around, though, is the addition ▶

MOON PATROL

UP ON THE BIG SCREEN
(METRO KINGDOM #64)

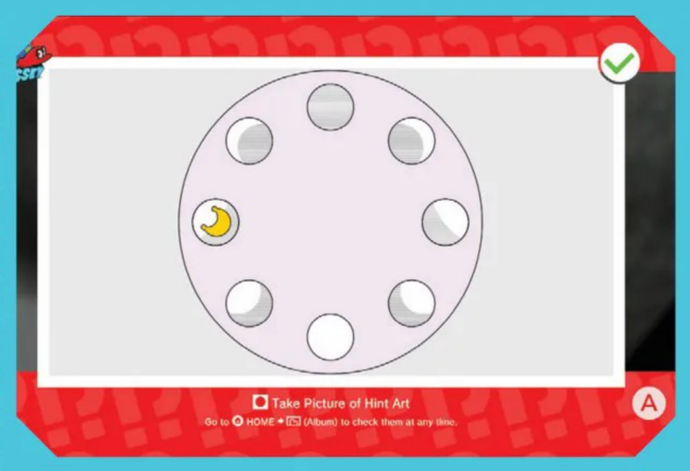
Relive the good old days in a level you can probably beat with your eyes closed. Finding this late on in the game is a real treat, and just reminds us of how far Mario has come.

BREAKDOWN ROAD
(WOODED KINGDOM #75)

There are two moons here, and dropping down to the area below will let you grab the secret one by taking control of Banzai Bill. In the end game you have to do it all again, but without your hat…

KOOPA FREERUNNING
(BOWSER KINGDOM #58)

The Koopa races can be tough, but the race in Bowser's Kingdom is just great fun. Leap off the high points and you can soar huge distances – just don't overdo it and plummet to your death.



FOUND WITH DARK SIDE ART 4 (DARK SIDE #18)

One of the coolest and cleverest ideas in *Mario Odyssey* is how it uses simple images as puzzles. Try to solve them without Googling the answer for a real sense of achievement.

Beating challenges without your hat will test your classic Mario platforming skills.

LIGHT FROM THE CEILING
(MUSHROOM KINGDOM #25)

Enter Peach's castle and you'll get an instant hit of nostalgia. Back in the N64 days, looking into the sun coming through the castle roof would take you to a secret level. Here, it gives you a moon.

LAVA BUBBLE

Grab a Lava Bubble and you can swim around in the hot stuff, fire yourself out of lava cannons, and beat giant bird bosses that are trying to eat the Luncheon Kingdom's special stew.

THIS GUY

Possess this dude in New Donk City and take control of a tiny RC car. Not only will this help you earn a few moons, it also plays a remix of the classic *Super Mario Kart* soundtrack!

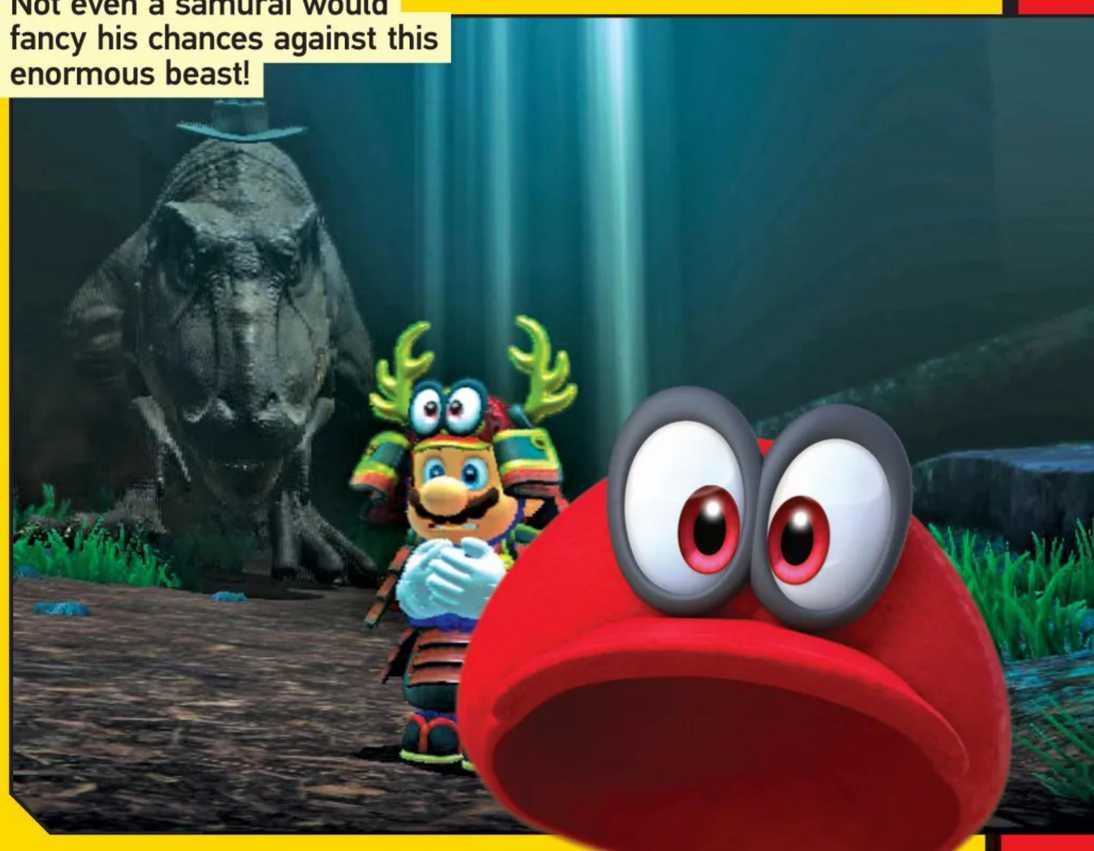
Luigi makes an appearance as part of a recent DLC pack which added an online balloon challenge mode.

▶ of moons. Unlike stars and shines from previous games, nabbing a moon won't whisk you out of the level and back to a hub world. Instead, you're given a brief congratulation, then you crack on with collecting. According to Motokura, this idea was chosen with the Switch's handheld mode in mind: "With the addition of the Power Moons and large number of them that you can collect, if you have two or three minutes and you're on the go, you can collect Power Moons because they're hidden everywhere."

Collecting all 999 is a challenge few will complete, but it means that there is always something you can do in the game when you pick it up. Did we get them all? Of course we did. The last few are no joke, let us tell you. Beating the Darker Side challenge is pleasingly tough, and grinding coins to grab the last 150 or so from the shop took a few hours. Of course, then we had to get all of the outfits as well, which meant another few runs through a particularly coin-rich area.

You can buy keepsakes from every kingdom you visit, although they do clutter the place up a bit.

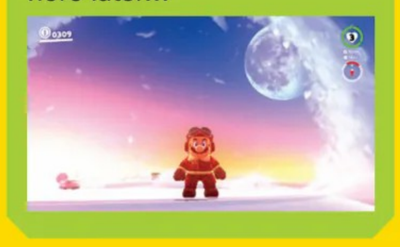
And the outfits! From themed looks that fit each kingdom, to in-jokes and references that only fans of the series will get, the wide selection of colourful costumes are fantastic additions to the game. Not only is each one carefully designed to replicate other characters or eras, they are all described in the shop by a Nintendo with its tongue firmly in its cheek. Without a doubt, though, our highlight was the reward you can purchase for 20 purple coins in the Mushroom Kingdom. We won't spoil it, but it shows that Nintendo recognises how far it has come, and how much it respects its past. It's the perfect reward for those that complete the main story, and an incredible celebration of the series. If you haven't played it yet, do it now. ■

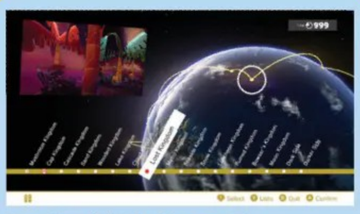


Not even a samurai would fancy his chances against this enormous beast!

CLOUD KINGDOM

There isn't much to this tiny kingdom – it's mostly the basis for an epic boss battle – but there are some secrets to discover here later...



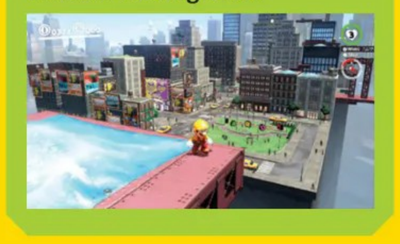


LOST KINGDOM

Welcome to the jungle – Mario style. Packed with Wigglers and surrounded by poisonous swamp, this kingdom isn't exactly for the lighthearted.

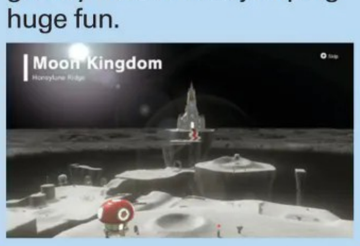
METRO KINGDOM

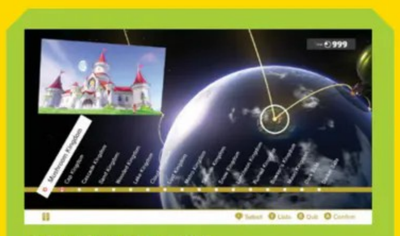
Explore the bustling metropolis of New Donk City and find the copious amount of fun Easter eggs (and moons) that are littered throughout.



MOON KINGDOM

Mario has to stop the wedding of Bowser and Peach, and to do it he has to go to the Moon. The low gravity here makes jumping huge fun.



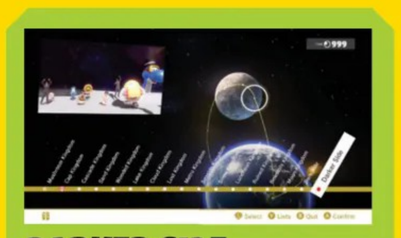


MUSHROOM KINGDOM

Take a trip down memory lane around (and inside) Peach's castle. You might even find an old friend on the roof...

DARK SIDE

The Dark Side of the Moon is exactly as bad as it sounds. You'll have to defeat five bosses in a row without dying... which is quite a challenge.



DARKER SIDE

Once you've nabbed 500 moons you can tackle the final challenge in the game, and it's a doozy. Get through it without dying and you'll be a true Superstar.

Mario Odyssey was the first 3D Mario game on Switch, but how did its new mechanics make it an entirely different kind of Mario experience? Stephen Ashby investigates its hat-throwing creativity

Imagine the pressure that the team creating *Super Mario Odyssey* must have been under. Not only were they creating the first 3D Mario game since *Super Mario 3D World* in 2013, they were also making the first Mario game for a brand-new console. Oh, and they were making a 3D Mario game. You know, just one of the most critically acclaimed game series in history. Whatever. No big deal really.

But the team had an ace up its sleeve in the form of a new character – Cappy. The hat is at the very core of *Odyssey*, and according to game director Kenta Motokura it was part of the game from the very first planning stages. "As far as the hat action goes it was included in one of the prototypes the staff had come up with. It was part of the game right from the beginning," he told *TIME* in an interview before the game went on sale.

Of course, having a unique central gameplay mechanic like this isn't new to the Mario series – just look at *Sunshine*'s FLUDD, or the gravity fields found in *Galaxy* and its sequel. But this time around, that hook didn't just create a new kind of attack or a way to interact with the world; it changed the game entirely.

Shigeru Miyamoto famously said, "A good idea is something that does not just solve one single problem, but rather can solve multiple problems at once," and that is exactly what Cappy does. You can use your hat to do pretty much everything in the game, and this means that for the first time this is a Mario game that isn't about jumping… it's about hat throwing.

Yes, you can still jump, and Mario actually has one of the most diverse and useful set of jumps we've ever seen in the series. But just think about it. You attack with a hat throw. You collect coins with a hat throw. You control enemies, open doors and smash boxes with a hat throw. Hell, there are even ? blocks at ground level – sure, you can butt-slam them, but don't they just cry out for a bash from Mario's bonnet?

The biggest benefit of this new interaction is that it simplifies everything. Mario games have always been designed to be straightforward – run left to right, jump on the heads of enemies, reach the flag. Things get more complicated in 3D space, but when your primary interaction with the world is a hat throw, every time you are unsure about what to do the game encourages you to hurl your headpiece. Does something look important? Throw your hat at it and you'll find out.

Of course, this was entirely by design. "Because throwing the cap is a new action, we want players to feel empowered or encouraged to go ahead and try this action wherever they feel it might work," Motokura told *TIME* in 2017. "There are certain topographical hints near areas where you're going to be looking, and you might say 'That looks like some place my hat might reach or might attach to.' So there are some hidden elements like that, that players will start to get used to."

It also simplifies combat, something that could have been tough for Mario in 3D space. Nintendo knows that jumping on an enemy's head in 3D is a challenge, so it always gives you an alternative. ▶

Yes, that is a skeletal version of Mario. Some of the outfits you can buy are pretty weird...

SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY

POSSESSION POWERS

POKIO
The beak of this oriental bird is essential to scale Bowser's Japanese-themed level. Watch out, though – that spiky samurai hat will give Mario a serious pain if he tries a butt-slam.

WIGGLER
For reaching far-flung platforms, the Wiggler's back feet remain on the platform, allowing Mario to stretch out and reach distant coins, or curve around walls to access hidden areas.

T-REX
Who wouldn't want to take control of a T-Rex? This reptile looks resplendent with Mario's hat and moustache, and is handy for destroying pretty much anything it comes into contact with.

BULLET BILL
These guys let you access new areas you couldn't otherwise reach. Take control of one and you can zoom across the map to get to high platforms or destroy blocks.

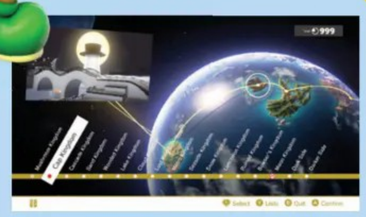
GUSHEN
If you're sick of Mario being a slowpoke swimmer, grab a Gushen for a quick boost. These octopus-like creatures can propel you into the air or across the water's surface.

CHAIN CHOMP
This terrifying ball of metallic death has long been an unstoppable force in Mario titles. Now you can control the barking beasts, and unleash their giant jaws on unsuspecting rock formations.

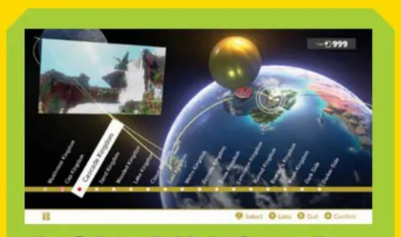
PARABONES
The freedom that the Parabones offer is fantastic. He can only fly one block higher than the level he stands on, but you can move him higher by landing on higher blocks. Great for exploring.

FROG
The game's first controllable creature, but also one of the most useful. With its high jump crossing large areas is easier – especially on the Moon, where a jump almost takes you into orbit.

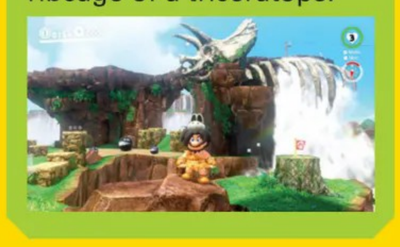
THE KINGDOMS OF ODYSSEY



CAP KINGDOM
Cappy's home is also the starting location for Mario's adventure. Bowser has destroyed the quaint kingdom, and now only Mario can help…

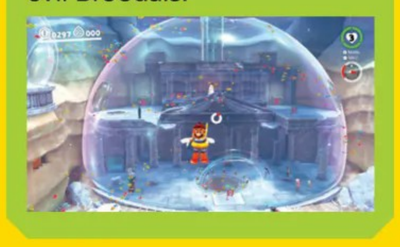


CASCADE KINGDOM
This epic prehistoric paradise is home to a sleepy T-Rex, and centres around a huge waterfall that erupts from the ribcage of a triceratops.



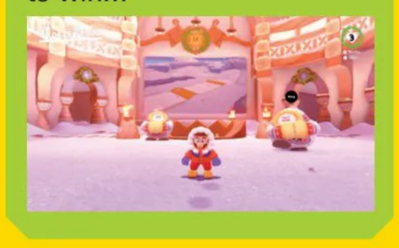
SAND KINGDOM
You'll be running across rolling dunes and exploring ancient, inverted pyramids in this Mexican-themed desert. Mario will definitely get sand in his shoes.

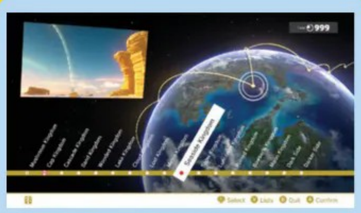
LAKE KINGDOM
What better way to wash off all that sound than in this watery world? Explore the underwater ruins of Lake Lamode and drive out the evil Broodals.



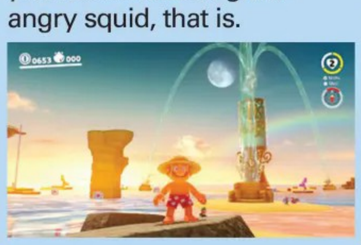
WOODED KINGDOM
This multi-level kingdom is much bigger than it first seems. Climb to the top of the structure, then leap off the side and explore the dark underworld.

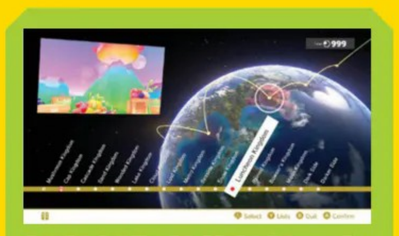
SNOW KINGDOM
Wrap up warm in Shiveria, the city under the frozen lake in the Snow Kingdom. The races are a highlight here, but they aren't easy to win…



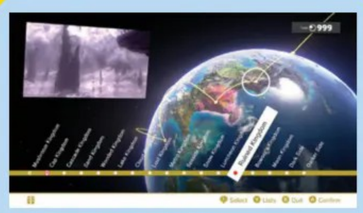


SEASIDE KINGDOM
Put Mario in some comfy swim shorts and relax on the beach in the sunny Seaside Kingdom – once you've defeated a giant angry squid, that is.





LUNCHEON KINGDOM
Foodies rejoice! Luncheon Kingdom is full of colourful ingredients and red-hot soup. Reach the top of the mountain to find yourself a tasty dish.



RUINED KINGDOM
A damaged Odyssey crash lands on this dark, stormy kingdom which mostly serves as a stage for one of the most epic boss fights in Mario history.

BOWSER'S KINGDOM
This is the most visually impressive of all the kingdoms, from the Japanese-inspired architecture to the huge scale of the world.

×4

0×11

Super Mario 3D World

MULTIPLAYER MARIO PERFECTED

» WII U » NINTENDO » 2013

Mario and multiplayer hasn't had the most solid relationship. I remember gazing upon that 'Two-Player Game' option in the original *Super Mario Bros* and summoning my older brother over so that we could run through the Mushroom Kingdom together, only to find to my dismay that we had to, sigh, *pass the pad* and *take turns*.

I had some later Mario multiplayer success with *Mario 64* on the DS, which had a dedicated multiplayer mode allowing you to link up with four other DS-holding friends (and you only needed one game cart, which was a bonus), but for years I yearned for that initial dream: I wanted to have a full co-op mode in a classically styled Mario game.

The obvious candidate for this would be *New Super Mario Bros*, also on the DS, but the best multiplayer Mario, I feel, is the Wii U's *Super Mario 3D World*. Its world is practically begging to be explored with a friend, and with its wealth of different characters and power-ups you and your buddy (or buddies if you are lucky to have many friends) will be occupied for a good long gaming session. I say 'long' because you won't really want to put it down until you've all finished it.

It's a shame, then, that the Wii U passed so many gamers by – me included – because they've missed out on a truly great multiplayer Mario experience, and a refreshing one at that. I reckon this could go head to head with *Smash Bros* or *Mario Kart* at a gaming night, you know. *Super Mario 3D World* ended up selling around the region of 5.75 million, while the Switch's *Mario Odyssey*, by comparison, tickles 9 million at the time of writing this.

Now here is when I became one of those infamous Switch port beggars, but with good reason. When I first experienced *3D World* I was at a game night with a couple of friends and I couldn't shake the thought that I *needed* to show this to my brother and have that multiplayer *Mario* experience we dreamed of. However, my persistent moaning has been answered, and you can now play this side-scrolling superstar on the Switch. Time to fetch my brother, I think!

SILVER-SCREEN STARDOM

THE SUPER MARIO BROS. MOVIE

FIND OUT HOW NINTENDO, ILLUMINATION STUDIOS AND AN ALL-STAR CAST RESCUED MARIO'S HOLLYWOOD LEGACY AND CREATED A BOX-OFFICE SMASH

Mario has always felt like a natural fit for the acting world – not only is he one of the most versatile leading men in video games, but *Super Mario Bros. 3* even had the theme of a stage play woven throughout its look. His adventures made their way to TV screens in animated series like *The Super Mario Bros. Super Show*, *The Adventures of Super Mario Bros. 3* and *Super Mario World*, while Japanese audiences had been able to see him in adaptations of traditional tales like *Snow White* and *Momotaro*. But when the 1993 live-action *Super Mario Bros.* movie came up from the iconic green pipe, it smelt as though it had spent considerable time in the sewers.

Nintendo was reluctant to work with Hollywood at all after that. In 2013, Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto told BuzzFeed News, "There have been a lot of cases where we've been approached by different people with lots of different ideas," but movies and games are quite different and "don't always necessarily mix."

In 2014, leaked emails from Sony Pictures seemed to suggest that a deal had been reached for a new animated movie, but nothing came to pass. The situation finally turned around when talks to create Nintendo theme park attractions with Universal Parks & Resorts brought Miyamoto into contact with Chris Meledandri, founder and producer at Universal's animation studio Illumination. In an investor call in 2018, shortly after the film was officially confirmed to be in development, Miyamoto claimed that he felt Meledandri "had a similar approach to creation" and that they "share the feeling that if we can't make something interesting we'll just call it quits."

The *Teen Titans Go!* creators Aaron Horvath and Michael Jelenic were brought in to direct the film, ▶

Remember when Mario and Luigi were Brooklyn plumbers? *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* certainly does.

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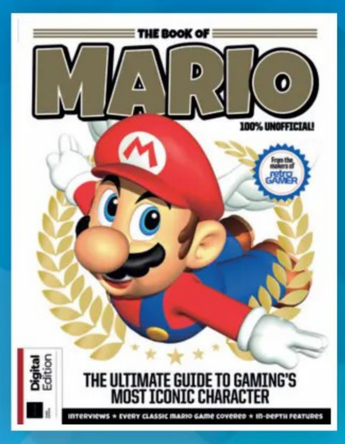

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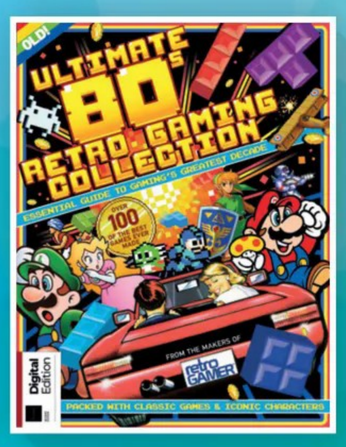
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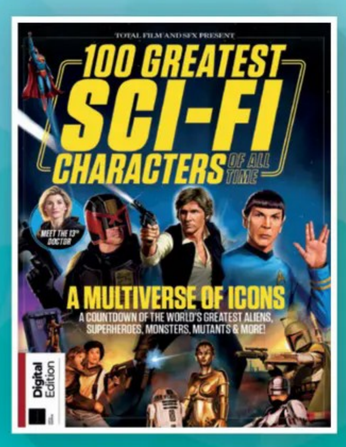
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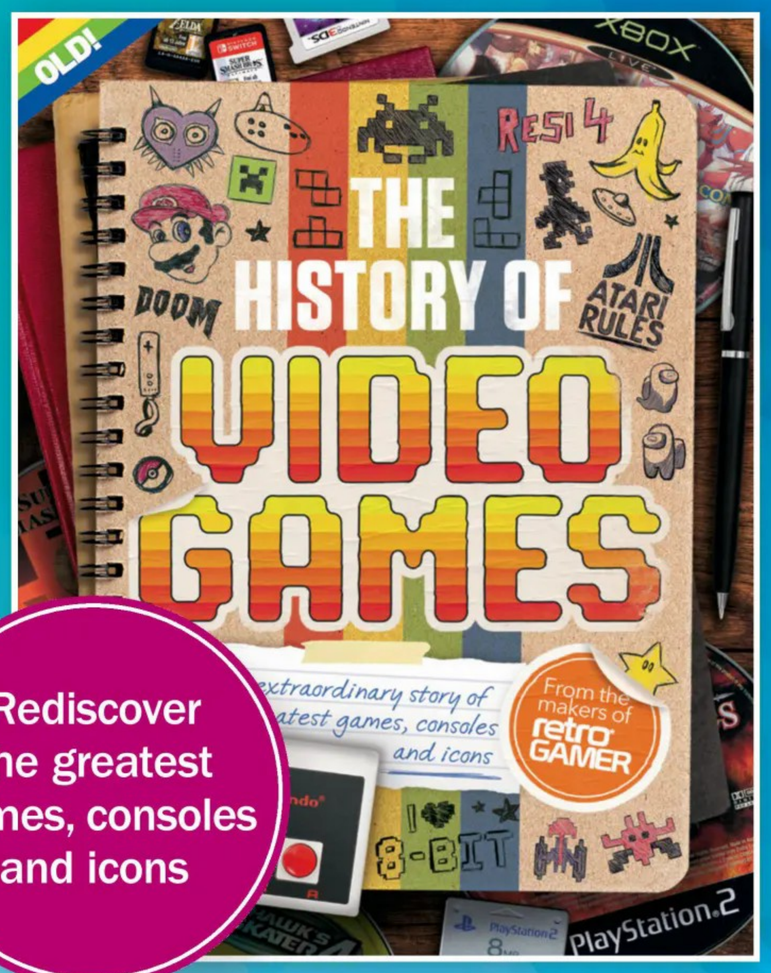

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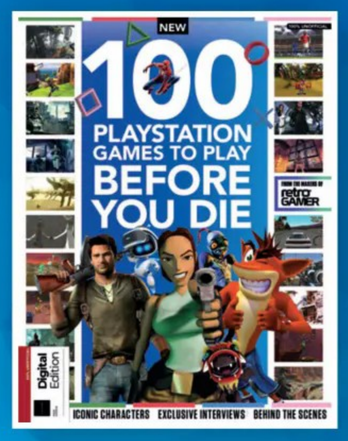
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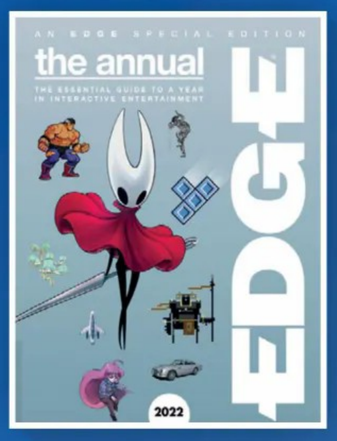

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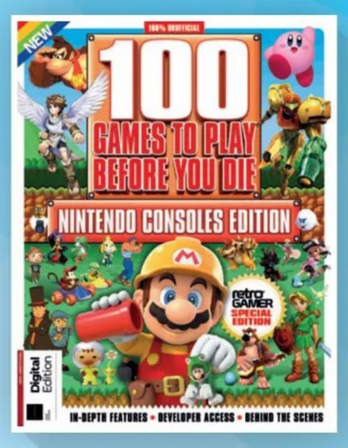

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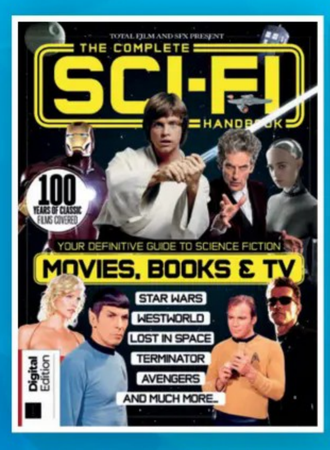

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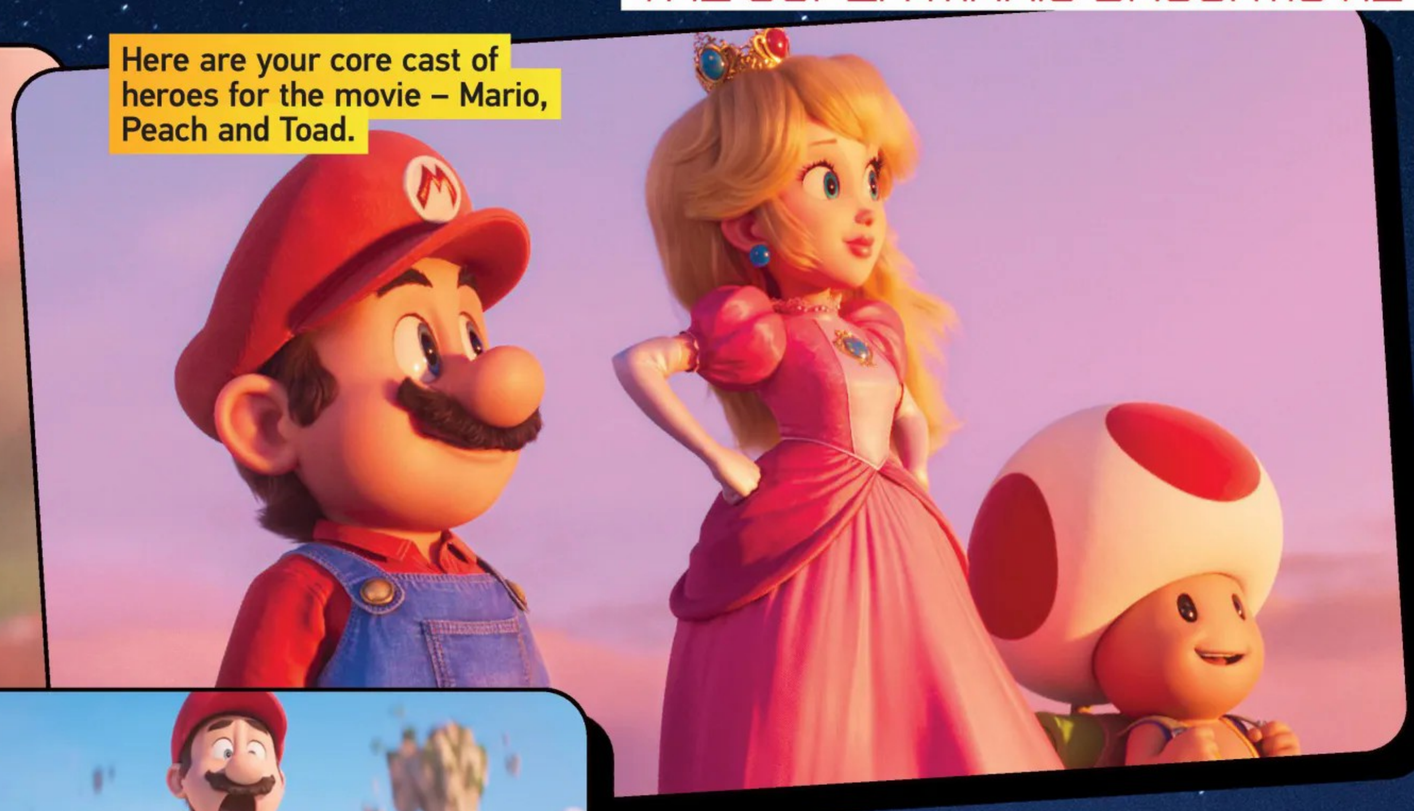

Here are your core cast of heroes for the movie – Mario, Peach and Toad.

Those stomach-churning Mario Kart jumps made their way from the small screen to the silver screen.

Donkey Kong might look mean, but he sounds... well, just like Seth Rogen.

movie of lacking imagination and creativity before slamming the decision to cater to die-hard fans as an "empty gesture that borders on condescension".

Audiences were unswayed by the uneven reviews and turned *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* into a massive box-office success upon its release on 5 April 2023, smashing a variety of records. Its opening weekend generated $375.6 million in ticket sales, surpassing the record for the highest-grossing opening for an animated movie previously held by *Frozen II*. With a gross worldwide total of $1.349 billion, it also holds the box-office record for a video game adaptation, making more money than its three nearest competitors – *Warcraft*, *Pokémon Detective Pikachu* and *Rampage* – combined.

Having achieved such a roaring success that even Bowser himself might struggle to be heard over it, a sequel to *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* feels like an inevitability, but so far nothing has been confirmed. When asked about a follow-up movie by entertainment news site ET in June 2023, Chris Pratt said, "I think soon," but he noted that the ongoing strike action by the Writers Guild of America had put the project on hold. "When the negotiations have been completed, and the writers feel comfortable moving forward, then it'll be time to start talking about what's next for that."

Other stars have also spoken about their desire for spin-off projects. Charlie Day has repeatedly expressed interest in a Luigi's Mansion film, most recently telling **ComicBook.com**, "Let's make this happen, okay? I am in," when asked about it in March 2023, while Anya Taylor-Joy said, "Absolutely, I'd be so happy to do it," when E! News asked about the possibility of a "girl power Princess Peach spin-off" in April 2023.

No matter what happens in the future, *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* has already carved out its place in history. With its astounding box-office success and the outpouring of love from fans of the series, *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* is destined to be the positively remembered film that the plucky plumber has always deserved – a film that not only rewards you for the hours you've spent playing Mario's games but which inspires you to play even more. Now, if you'll excuse us, we feel like a quick cruise along Rainbow Road.

THE 1993 DISASTER

While younger fans looked forward to *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* with unreserved enthusiasm, fans of a certain age were far more cautious. After all, they'd been burned once before – badly.

30 years before the plumber's animated triumph, Hollywood had relied on Mario's star power for its first-ever video game adaptation, a live action movie starring Bob Hoskins as Mario, John Leguizamo as Luigi, Samantha Mathis as Princess Daisy and Dennis Hopper as President Koopa.

The film's plot was utterly bizarre, with the brothers venturing into a parallel dimension inhabited by humanoid dinosaurs after Daisy is kidnapped and taken there. President Koopa pulls classic Bowser tricks like pretending to be a lawyer, an anti-Koopa street musician named Toad gets transformed into a visually horrifying Goomba, and Yoshi would have looked more at home in *Jurassic Park*.

Super Mario Bros. was a flop upon its release in 1993. Movie critic Gene Siskel noted that it "can't decide if it wants to be a flesh and blood film or a real video game," giving it two thumbs down, and its box-office gross of $38.9 million failed to recoup a budget reported to be $42-48 million. Bob Hoskins and Dennis Hopper both later described the film as a "nightmare" and criticised co-directors Rocky Morton and Annabel Jankel.

Despite its rotten contemporary reception, *Super Mario Bros.* has become a cult favourite and is still available today.

THE BOOK OF

MARIO

Retro Gamer celebrates the legacy of Nintendo's greatest star, from Super Mario Bros to the stunning Super Mario Odyssey

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We speak to key developers about the series, including Mario's creator, Shigeru Miyamoto

CLASSIC SPIN-OFFS

Discover the many games and genres that Mario has featured in when he's not out platforming

9001
9002
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Players rarely succeed first time in Mario, and that carries over to his onscreen exploits.

with Matthew Fogel (who also worked on *The LEGO Movie 2*) writing the screenplay.

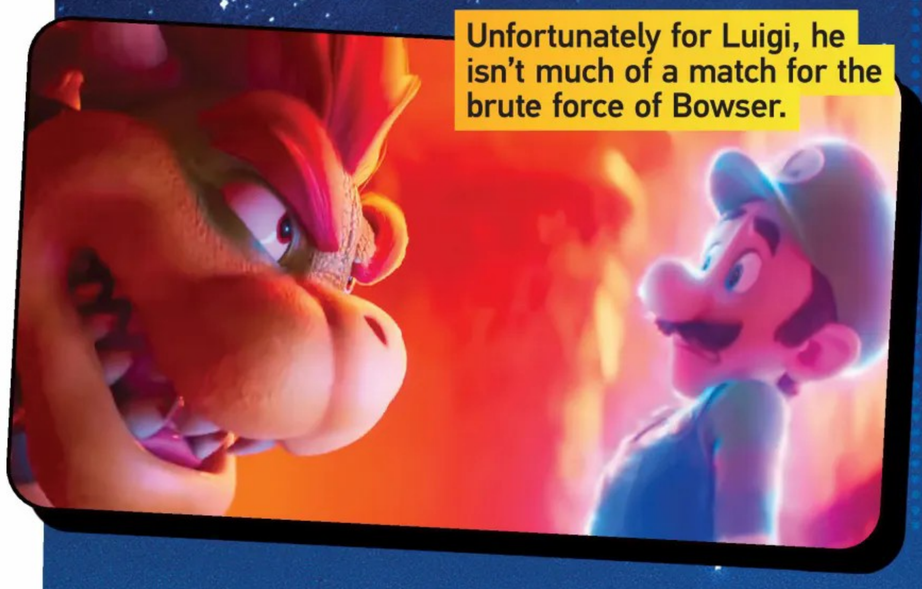
In an interview with *Animation Magazine*, the co-directors explained their approach to the project, with Horvath stating that "there had never been a really authentic Super Mario movie or TV show that was satisfying" and Jelenic adding that they were trying for "the opposite treatment of *Teen Titans Go!*," with choices determined by the question "how do we make this feel bigger and more emotional?"

Brian Tyler scored the movie and animation primarily took place at Illumination Studios Paris, with Horvath explaining that the intended look was "cartoony and semi-realistic. There are moments of cartoony fun, but it's probably more of an action movie. We wanted it to feel like a big adventure film and that there are stakes and maybe you believe that these characters can die, so they're not super-squashy and super-stretchy."

In February 2021, Mario's in-game voice actor Charles Martinet said that he hadn't been contacted, but "if they invite me to play, I'll go in and play with great joy and happiness". Though he ultimately did end up with a part, a celebrity cast took the main roles. Chris Pratt was cast as Mario and Charlie Day as Luigi, with both having to adjust their voices to avoid similarities to famous gangsters: Pratt told *Entertainment Weekly* that "For a minute, I walked in and they were like, 'That's a little New Jersey. You're doing a Tony Soprano thing,'" while Day said "Every now and then they would say, 'Charlie, maybe a little less "Goodfellas" in this one.'"

Seth Rogen voiced Donkey Kong, having told the production team, "If you want me to be in this movie, it's gonna sound like me and that's it." Other key roles were also filled by celebrities, with Anya Taylor-Joy as Peach and Jack Black as Bowser.

The movie itself sets up Mario and Luigi as plumbing partners in Brooklyn who soon end up separated when they encounter a warp pipe in the process of fixing a leaking water main. From there, Luigi is imprisoned by Bowser, who is threatening the destruction of the Mushroom Kingdom if he can't marry Peach, while Mario finds Peach seeking the support of the Kong family in repelling his advances. Some of the more memorable scenes include a clash between Mario and his oldest rival, Donkey Kong, the penguins' spirited defence of their castle from Bowser's invading forces, a Mario Kart confrontation between the heroes and Bowser's minions on Rainbow Road, appearances from Mario's classic power-up suits and a climactic encounter that straddles the film's various settings.



Unfortunately for Luigi, he isn't much of a match for the brute force of Bowser.

"THERE HAD NEVER BEEN A REALLY AUTHENTIC SUPER MARIO MOVIE OR SHOW"

Here's Mario in his most familiar environment – surrounded by mushrooms because he's a fun guy (sorry).

Critics gave *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* a mixed reception, summarised by its Rotten Tomatoes score of 58% and Metacritic score of 46/100. Danny Leigh scored the movie three of five stars in the *Financial Times*, saying that "The 8-bit world is faithfully reimagined for the modern under-10" but that it could be "slightly dull for anyone else." He also praised the way that it was "squarely made for actual children, rather than with one eye on the reviews." Video Games Chronicle awarded it four of five stars, with reviewer Bex April May declaring it "the greatest video game movie adaptation of all time". Tom Phillips of Eurogamer felt that "the Mushroom Kingdom has truly never looked any better thanks to the technical wizardry of *Despicable Me* creators Illumination, or sounded any finer thanks to gorgeous orchestral reimaginings from 30 years of Mario video game history," and that "while the plot may be thin, the laughs are pretty constant".

On the less positive side, Calum Marsh of the *New York Times* praised the movie's detailed recreation of Mario's world but felt that "the attitude is all wrong," claiming that the writing "leans hard on winking humor and bland, hackneyed irony". Writing in the *New York Post*, Johnny Oleksinski felt that it was "just another soulless ploy to sell us merchandise that doesn't bother to disguise its creativity-starved greed".

Offering one and a half stars out of four for *The Boston Globe*, Odie Henderson claimed that *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* "isn't a movie; it's a checklist of fan expectations." He continued his scathing appraisal by accusing the